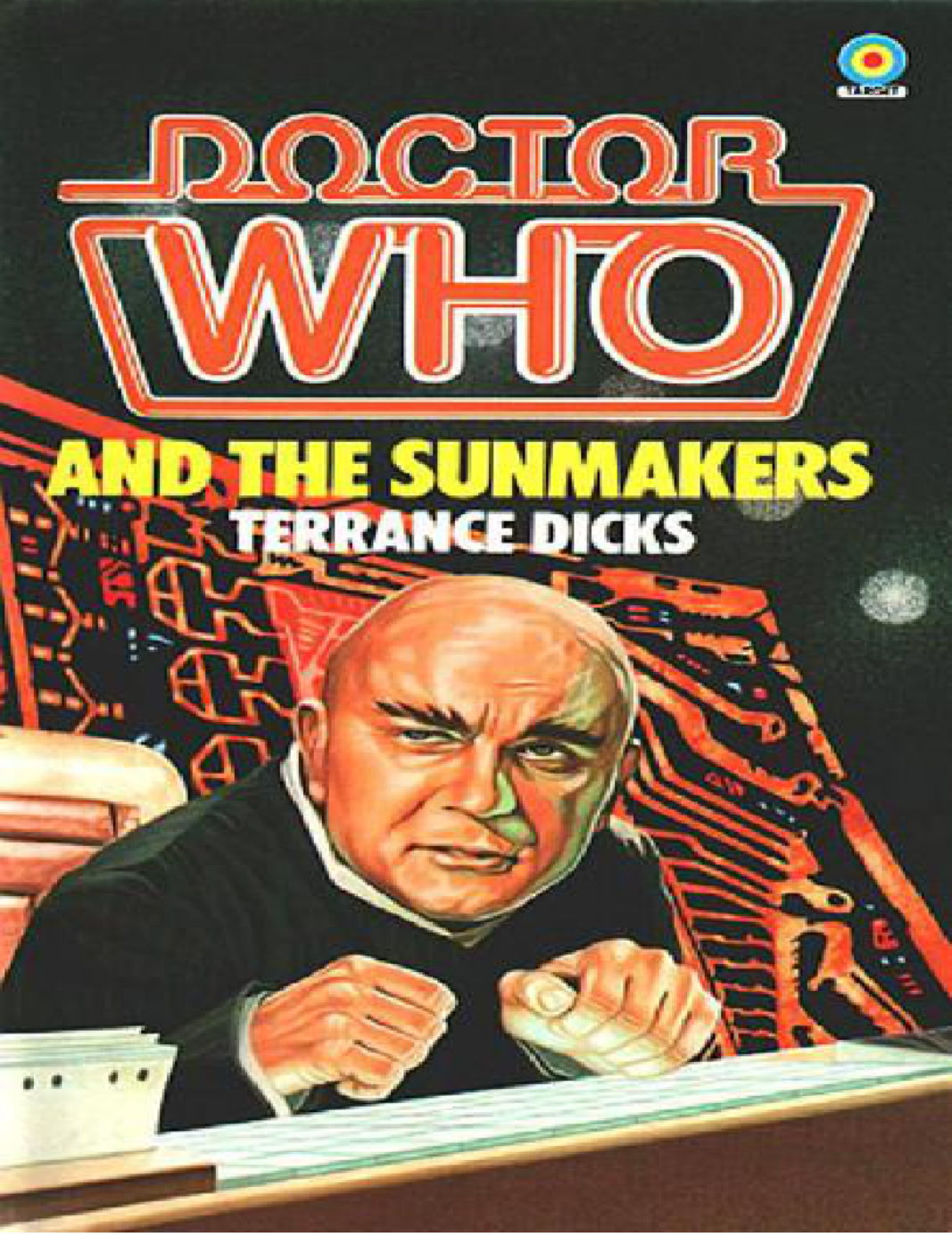
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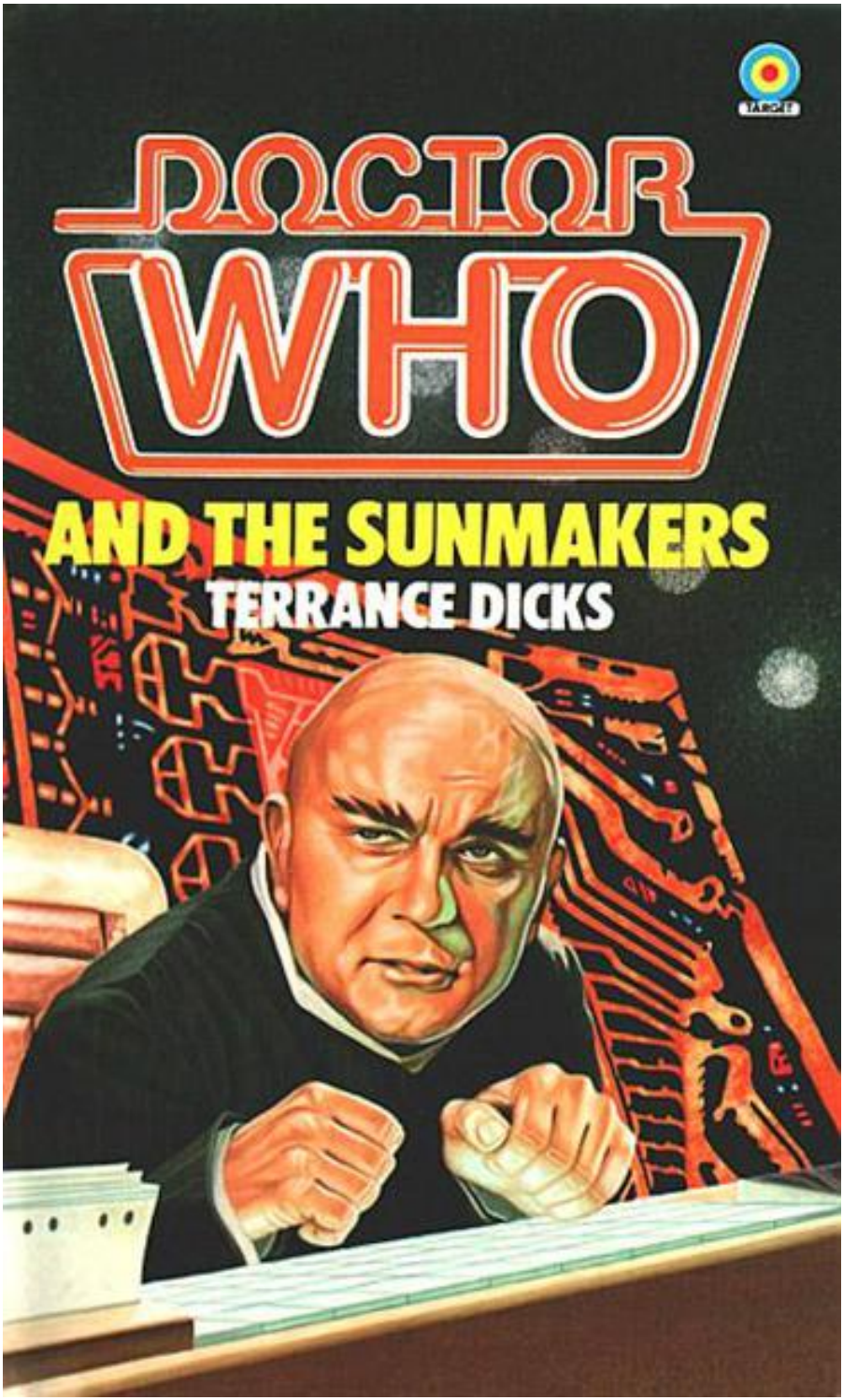

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1

The Cost of the Golden Death

In a drab and featureless corridor, a drab and featureless man stood waiting before a shuttered hatch. His name was Cordo and he wore the simple yellow coveralls of a D-grade Citizen, with the symbol of the Sunmakers on the breast, a stylised face from which radiated the sun's rays.

He had been waiting for a very long time, the dull nagging ache of sorrow filling his heart. Even D-grade Citizens have feelings, though they seldom show them.

Cordo's father was dying.

Suddenly the hatch snapped open, revealing a woman in the uniform of a B-grade Nurse. She looked up and down the corridor, then returned her gaze to Cordo. 'Yes?'

'Citizen Cordo, District Four. My father... is there news?'

'One moment.' She touched a console, studying the read-out screen in front of her. 'Congratulations, Citizen Cordo. Your father ceased at 1.10.'

Tears flooded Cordo's eyes, and he rubbed them away.

'All was well?'

'A fine death. Body weight at termination was 84 kilos.'

Cordo bowed his head. 'I am gratified.'

The nurse's voice sharpened. 'Gatherer Hade will be waiting for the

death taxes.'

Cordo fumbled inside his tunic. 'I have them here.'

'Then pay them. At the Gatherer's Office!' The shutter slammed shut.

Another corridor, another endless wait. Cordo's turn came at last and he was shown into an office, furnished in the ornately luxurious style that befitted the exalted status of Gatherer. There was even an enormous table made from genuine wood – an object of immense age and incredible value.

Gatherer Hade was behind his desk when Cordo entered. His costume matched the ornateness of his office–

a black-and-pink striped affair with flowing cape and turban-like head-dress. He went on working for a moment, his pudgy face grave and absorbed.

Cordo stood before the desk, shuffling his feet uneasily.

At last Hade looked up. 'Well, Citizen?'

'Citizen Cordo, District Four. Death taxes. My father. I have brought them with me.'

Cordo fumbled inside his tunic and produced a battered plastic purse stuffed with painfully accumulated low-value metal tokens. He was about to put it on the table, but Hade snapped. 'Not on my table. You'll mark it.'

Cordo peered reverently at the darkly gleaming surface.

'It is wood, your honour?'

'It is,' said Hade proudly. 'A particularly rare kind called mahogany. I don't suppose you've ever seen wood before, eh Citizen.'

Cordo shook his head. Like all lower-grade Citizens, he lived in a world of metal and plastic and artificial light.

'Never, Gatherer. But we learned about wood at Preparation Centre. There was even a picture of a tree, a fine-looking thing.'

'Merely a primitive way of producing oxygen,' said Hade dismissively. 'Thanks to the Company we have no need of trees here on Pluto. Praise the Company!'

‘Praise the Company,’ echoed Cordo automatically.

Hade lifted a long roll of computer print-out from his desk. ‘Here is your account, Citizen. I see that you selected the Golden Death, with full mercy attendance.’

‘Yes, your honour. I always promised my father that when his death day came, there would be no suffering.’

‘Compassion is a noble thing,’ said Hade drily. ‘It is also costly. The account totals 117 talmars.’

Cordo gasped. ‘One hundred and seventeen – it can’t be!’

Hade passed over the print-out. ‘See the account for yourself.’

Cordo tried to study the columns of figures but they blurred before his eyes. ‘There must be some mistake. It should be 80. They told me it was 80 talmars for the Golden Death.’

‘The Collector recently raised death taxes.’

‘I didn’t know, your honour.’

‘The increase was bulletined.’

‘I didn’t see it.’

‘Then you should have. It is every citizen’s duty to keep himself informed of the tax rates.’

Cordo rubbed his tired eyes. ‘I have so little time. I have been working double shifts to earn the money.’

Hade snatched back the account, scanning the rows of figures with an experienced eye. ‘The account is correct.

Full mercy attendance is now another 18 talmars. Disposal fee, ten talmars. Plus of course value added tax of 10 per cent, total – taking into account the increase in death tax –

132 talmars. It is all here, you see... against that sum we set your father’s personal contribution of seven talmars...’

Hade looked up disapprovingly. ‘Life savings of only seven talmars, Citizen Cordo? He must have been a very poor man.’

‘He was,’ said Cordo humbly. ‘He was a municipal servant, your honour. Forty years he cleaned the walkways...’

Hade nodded. ‘Then there is the recycling allowance.

On his death-weight of 84 kilos, that is 8 talmars, leaving a total debt of 117 talmars.’

Cordo held out his purse. Please – I have only 86

talmars, and that has taken me years to save.’

Hade took the purse, emptied its contents into a drawer, and tossed the empty container back to Cordo. ‘How do you propose to settle the 31 talmars still outstanding?’

‘I cannot,’ said Cordo brokenly. ‘I have nothing, your honour. Nothing.’

‘Taxes are the primary obigation of the Citizen,’ said Hade sharply. ‘I see you are a D-grade foundry worker?’

‘Yes, your honour.’

‘Perhaps I can help you. Fortunately, as Gatherer, I have certain special powers.’

Cordo looked at him disbelievingly. Could it be that the Gatherer was showing mercy? ‘Help me, your honour?’

‘I will have a word with your Supervisor,’ said Hade briskly. ‘He will be instructed to allow you a special increase in your out-put.’

‘Your honour, I am already working a double shift. I have only my three hours’ sleeping time away from the factory’

‘Twenty-one hours a week, wasted unproductivity. You must manage without sleep-time until the debt is paid.’

‘It will kill me!’

‘Take Q-capsules,’ snapped Hade. ‘Sleep is an unnecessary luxury.’

‘But your honour, the high medical tax on Q-capsules means I cannot afford to buy them!’

Hade rose dismissively. ‘You complain too much, Citizen Cordo.

Thank the Company you are warm, and fed.'

'Praise the Company,' said Cordo dully.

'You may go, Citizen.'

'I am gratified, your honour.' Cordo bowed low, and backed away.

In the impossibly large control room of the space/time craft called the TARDIS, a very tall, curly-haired man wearing an incredibly long scarf was playing chess with a robot dog.

A tall, brown-haired girl was watching them. She wore a brief garment made of animal skins, and there was a fighting-knife at her hip.

The Doctor completed his move and sat back, smiling complacently. He looked up at the girl. 'You see, Leela?

Even simple one-dimensional chess exposes the limitations of the machine mind!'

Leela made no reply. She was under the impression that they were engaged in some complicated ritual to propitiate the TARDIS, which she firmly believed to be some kind of god.

K9 scanned the board, whirred, clicked, buzzed and said. 'Bishop to Queen 6, Mistress.'

Leela, who was acting as K9's hands, leaned forwards, moving the piece in accordance with the sacred ritual.

'Here?'

'Affirmative.' K9 cocked his head up at the Doctor.

'Check, Master.'

'What?' The Doctor stared indignantly at the chess board.

'Furthermore, my machine mind computes mate in six moves'

'Rubbish!' said the Doctor crossly.

Leela looked worriedly at him. Clearly the Doctor was not pleased. Perhaps the ritual was not going well.

Suddenly she noticed something, and jumped up. ‘Doctor, look!’

‘Leela, will you keep still?’

‘But Doctor –’

‘And keep quiet. I’m trying to concentrate.’

K9’s eyes glowed triumphantly. ‘Your move, Master.’

‘I’m well aware that it’s my move, thank you, K9. Don’t you flash your eyes at me.’

The Doctor hitched irritably at his scarf, managingto knock several pieces off the board with the trailing end. It was no doubt purely accidental that the slight error he made in replacing them on the board left him in a rather better position in the game.

K9 missed nothing. ‘Wrong square, Master.’

‘What?’

‘Your King, Master. Wrong square.’

‘Really,’ said the Doctor guiltily. ‘Are you sure?’

‘Affirmative, Master.’

The Doctor stared thoughtfully at the board.

Leela took advantage of the pause. ‘Doctor, may I speak now?’

‘If you must. What is it?’

‘The centre column of the TARDIS has stopped moving.’

‘ *What*?’ yelled the Doctor. He leaped to his feet and began flicking switches on the many-sided central control console.

‘Is it important?’ asked Leela. She was quite convinced that the stopping of the column was in some way connected to the ritual of the chess game.

‘Oh no,’ said the Doctor bitterly. ‘We could have gone right through the time spiral, that’s all! Why didn’t you tell me?’

‘I tried to tell you but you wouldn’t listen.’

‘You didn’t!’

‘I did!’

The TARDIS juddered.

‘It’s this new paint,’ said the Doctor apologetically, referring to a recent re-decoration of the control room.

‘Always jams things up. We’ll materialise and take a reading.’

He made a few more adjustments to the controls and the column glided smoothly to a halt. The Doctor studied the navigational console and gave a little whistle of surprise.

‘Where are we?’ asked Leela.

‘Still in the solar system-but only just. Pluto.’

‘Pluto?’

The name meant nothing to Leela, but K9 was more than ready to enlighten her. ‘Pluto, the ninth planet of the Earth’s solar system was believed, until the discovery of Cassius, to be the outermost body of the system. Pluto has a diameter of 3,600 Earth miles…’

The Doctor was studying the console worriedly. ‘Leela, keep your tin pet quiet,’ he said rudely.

Remorsely K9 continued, ‘The distance of Pluto from the sun is…’

Leela nudged him with her foot. ‘Sssh, K9. You can tell me later.’

The Doctor was shaking his head. ‘Breathable atmosphere? That’s all wrong for a start.’

He switched on the scanner, revealing a multi-storied ultra-modern city of gleaming domes and towers.

‘There are many buildings,’ whispered Leela. ‘A great city?’

‘Precisely. And Pluto is supposed to be a lifeless rock.’

The Doctor looked meaningfully at Leela. ‘I think you and I should take a W-a-l-k.’

‘W-a-l-k?’ repeated Leela puzzled.

‘Walk, Mistress,’ said K9 excitedly. ‘Ready, Master.’ He glided towards the door.

The Doctor shook his head. ‘You’re not coming K9.

You stay here.’

‘Entreat, Master!’ pleaded K9.

‘No.’

‘I’ll be good!’

‘No,’ repeated the Doctor. ‘What we can see on the scanner may be some kind of illusion. Pluto is no place for you.’ He operated the door control.

K9’s tail-antenna dropped pathetically and Leela said,

‘Sorry, K9. We won’t be long.’ She followed the Doctor out of the TARDIS.

They found themselves, rather disappointingly, on what seemed to be an enormous flat roof, surrounded with a low parapet. Despite a dull and hazy sky, the heat of an unseen sun seemed to beat down on them. In the middle of the roof was a metal hut-like structure with a door in it.

‘Quite warm,’ said the Doctor thoughtfully. ‘Around 20

Centigrade.’

Leela sniffed suspiciously. ‘The air is scented.’ A faint but cloying perfume seemed to hang in the air.

‘Well, it shouldn’t be – shouldn’t be any air at all.

Shouldn’t be this warm either, unless the sun’s turned nova.’

Leela went to the parapet and looked over. ‘Come and look, Doctor!’

The Doctor followed her. Peering over the parapet he looked down – and down and down.

The building on which they stood was incredibly high, towering amongst others over the gleaming metallic city they had seen on the TARDIS scanner.

The Doctor fished an ancient telescope from his pocket and surveyed the city around him. ‘Incredible! What an engineering achievement. It must have taken centuries to build a city like this!’ He felt Leela tugging his sleeve.

‘Don’t jog me, Leela, you can have a turn with the telescope in a minute.’

Leela tugged again, pointing. ‘Doctor, look! Someone’s coming!’

The Doctor lowered his telescope and turned.

A small depressed-looking man in a yellow coverall had emerged from the hut, and was trudging across the roof, heading for a point on the parapet some way away. He certainly didn’t look as if he presented any kind of threat, and didn’t seem to register the presence of the Doctor and Leela on the roof.

As they watched, he reached the parapet, climbed laboriously on top of it and stood poised.

‘Doctor, we’ve got to stop him,’ whispered Leela. ‘He’s going to jump!’

2

The Fugitive

‘Hey, you!’ shouted Leela. ‘Come down!’

The little man on the parapet paused, and looked at her in astonishment.

‘Come down, *please*,’ called Leela again.

The man stared blankly at her. He raised one foot.

‘No, don’t! Don’t jump!’

The Doctor could feel Leela quivering beside him, poised to spring. Leela could move with astonishing speed–but the man on the parapet was just one step away from death. She would never reach him in time.

‘Don’t frighten him,’ whispered the Doctor. He ambled across the roof, smiling broadly. ‘Splendid view isn’t it?

Tell me, how high is this building?’

‘A thousand metres,’ said the little man dully.

‘A thousand metres, eh? Most impressive. I’m the Doctor, by the way, and this is Leela.’

‘Citizen Cordo, D-grade, District Four.’

‘I do hope we weren’t interrupting you?’

‘What do you say, Citizen?’

‘Somehow I had the impression you might be trying to kill yourself.’

Cordo stared down into the abyss. ‘It’s the taxes, you see. I can’t pay the taxes.’

‘Oh, *taxes*,’ said the Doctor understandingly. ‘My dear chap, all you need is a wily accountant. Would you care for a jelly baby?’ He fished a crumpled paper bag from his pocket and held it out.

Cordo looked in amazement. ‘What?’

The Doctor popped a sweet into his mouth. ‘Try one,’

he said indistinctly. ‘They’re rather good!’ He held the bag out again. (From the corner of his eye, the Doctor could see Leela sidling ever closer, like a cat stalking a bird.) Almost automatically Cordo stretched out his hand –

and Leela sprang. Grabbing his arm she yanked him clear of the parapet, and the two of them went down in a struggling heap. The little man fought wildly, but Leela had dealt with tougher opponents than Cordo. In a matter of minutes she had him pinioned and helpless.

Moving to put himself between the little man and the parapet, the Doctor helped Cordo to his feet. ‘Now you were saying something about taxes, I believe?’

Gatherer Hade looked up impatiently as Marn came into his office. Sharp-faced and simply dressed, as befitted her position, Marn was one of his most prized assistants. ‘Well, what is it, Marn?’

‘An air-space violation, your honour, in District Four.

Deltavibe scanners also indicate an illegal landing – on block 40.’

Hade’s plump fingers flicked over the controls of the calculator on his

desk. He stood up, rubbing his hands.

‘Excellent! There is a 500-talmar fine for each offence.

Order my beamer immediately, Marn. We must apprehend the culprit!’

The culprit meanwhile was listening to Cordo’s stumbling account of his misfortunes – an account which painted a horrifying picture of life in this colony which had somehow become established on Pluto.

‘With the medical tax on the Q-capsules and work-tax on the extra hours, I could never clear the debt,’ concluded Cordo miserably. ‘You see, the Company charges 50 per cent compound interest on unpaid taxes. I’m only a gradeD work-unit, three talmars a shift.’ He shook his head.

‘Three talmars... it’s not enough. It’s never enough.’

‘Doctor, what is he saying?’ whispered Leela. ‘I understand nothing of it.’

‘Money troubles, Leela,’ said the Doctor sadly.

‘Apparently our friend here can’t make ends meet.

Probably too many economists in his government.’

Money meant little to Leela. ‘These taxes – they are like sacrifices to his tribal gods?’

The Doctor smiled. ‘Well, roughly the same – but paying tax is more painful!’

‘Then people should rise and slaughter their oppressors,’ said Leela fiercely.

The Doctor looked down at Cordo. ‘If our friend is at all typical, they’re so crushed they’ve no spirit left for fighting.’

Suddenly a weird electronic hooting rang out over the roof. Instantly, Cordo’s apathy turned to panic. He looked fearfully up at the Doctor. ‘It is the Gatherer! Quick – run!’

And Cordo ran, sprinting for the little doorway in the hut-structure in the middle of the roof.

Leela realised what was happening immediately. The Gatherer had featured largely in Cordo's story. No doubt it was the monster to which sacrifices had to be made – a kind of primitive Xoanon. Cordo had failed to make the proper sacrifices and now the monster was coming to eat him. 'Run, Doctor,' she shouted. 'It's the Gatherer!' Fleet-footed, she sped after Cordo.

The fierce hooting grew louder. The Doctor hesitated for a moment, then shrugged. Since the majority opinion seemed to be in favour of running, he'd better run. He dashed off after Leela.

Leela caught up with Cordo just as he was disappearing through the slatted metal door of the hut. She paused, waiting for the Doctor to catch up, and they both tumbled through after him.

There was a trapdoor in the floor of the hut and a ladder leading downwards. Cordo sprang towards the ladder, but the Doctor put a hand on his arm. 'Wait!'

Cordo tried to pull away. 'But if we're caught up here it's a fine of five talmars – or a week in the Correction Centre!'

'Why?' asked the Doctor simply. 'What have we done?'

'Just being here is an offence. Only the executive grade is allowed in the light of the suns.'

'What suns?'

'Ssh!' hissed Leela fiercely. She was crouched by the door, peering through the slats. 'Someone comes!'

Marn stood looking at the square blue box in total amazement. 'How did it get here?'

'Use your intelligence,' said Gatherer Hade wearily.

'You detected an air-space violation, did you not? Clearly a sky freighter has landed, deposited this object, and taken off again.'

'But what is it, your honour?'

'Obviously, it is a container.' Hade moved to the door and rapped it with his knuckles. 'Observe the lock!'

'He's trying to open the TARDIS,' whispered Leela.

The Doctor grinned. ‘Pity K9 doesn’t bark!’

Cordo tugged his sleeve. ‘Come quickly. We must get away from here.’ He began climbing down the ladder.

The Doctor followed. ‘For someone who wanted to kill himself a while ago, you seem very anxious not to be caught.’

Cordo’s voice floated upwards. ‘Death is easy to face, Doctor, particularly if it is quick. Obviously, you have never been in a Correction Centre.’

The ladder took them to a landing, and to a lift door.

Cordo stabbed at a control button and the door slid open.

‘Quickly now!’

He bustled the Doctor and Leela inside, and followed them. The door slid closed, and the lift began its descent.

Gatherer Hade paced around the TARDIS, deep in thought. ‘An intriguing case, this, Marn.’

Marn was still reeling under the shock. ‘It is almost inconceivable, your honour. To flout so many regulations at once!’

Hade rubbed his hands. ‘Exactly Marn. I smell something big – very big! Perhaps even another Kandor conspiracy.’

‘What was that, Gatherer?’ asked Marn humbly. ‘I have never heard of it.’

‘It was never publicised. It could have given others undesirable ideas.’ Hade paused, remembering. ‘Kandor was an executive grade in Megropolis Four. He falsified computer records in order to enrich himself and his fellow conspirators. Altogether, he defrauded the Company of over a million talmars.’

Marn was shocked to her conformist core. ‘The Company be praised! What happened to him?’

‘He survived for three whole years in the Correction Centre.’

Marn couldn’t help being impressed. ‘Three years!

Surely a record, your honour?’

‘He was young,’ said Hade. ‘And very strong.’

Marn turned back to the strange blue container.

‘Perhaps I can trace the delivery of this object through freighter records?’

Bade shook his head. ‘The attempt would be useless.

Whoever programmed the freighter will have used a self-destruction code. The instruction will not be retained in records.’

Once again Marn was shocked. ‘But that too is illegal!’

‘Does the burglar hesitate to break a window?’ asked Hade impatiently. ‘We are not dealing with some snivelling tax defaulter here, Marn. This is a carefully planned criminal enterprise.’

‘But to what end, your honour?’

‘To deprive the Company of its legal revenues by smuggling contraband goods into the Megropolis.’ Marn gave a gasp of horror, and Hade went on, ‘I see the sheer magnitude of the offence astounds you.’

‘Indeed it does; your honour. It is hard to conceive of such depths of criminality.’

‘It happens, Marn,’ said Hade dramatically. ‘Believe me, it happens – despite the screening, and the Preparation Centre – and the air-conditioning – criminal deviants and subversives reappear in every generation. Enemies of the Company!’

He strolled over to the parapet and stared out over the metallically gleaming towers of Megropolis One. ‘They had a saying on Old Earth: “There’s one rotten acorn in every barrel”.’ He swung round on Marn. ‘We must find that acorn Marn – and crush it!’

‘The Company be praised,’ said Marn reverently. ‘But how can it be done, your honour?’

Hade smiled evilly. ‘I have a plan.’

The lift went down and down and down, apparently forever.

‘Where are we going?’ demanded Leela.

‘I don’t know,’ said the Doctor indignantly. ‘Ask him.’

He nodded towards Cordo, who was crouched by the doors, watching the indicator. Strange, reflected the Doctor, but a lift was a lift, anywhere in the galaxy. ‘Why did you run, Leela?’

Leela looked at Cordo. ‘He ran first.’

‘That’s no answer.’

‘Well, why did you run?’

‘I don’t know,’ said the Doctor thoughtfully. ‘Because you two did, I suppose. Odd, isn’t it?’

‘Perhaps everyone runs from this Tax Gatherer,’ said Leela philosophically.

Cordo nodded vigorously, and the Doctor grinned. ‘He says you’re right, Leela!’

The lift jolted to a halt, with an abruptness that made Leela feel her stomach was somewhere around her ears.

The door slid open, revealing a featureless white corridor and Cordo shot along it like a rabbit down a burrow.

‘Hey, not so fast, little Cordo,’ called the Doctor.

‘What’s the hurry?’

Cordo paused, and then came back to them. ‘I must leave you here, Citizens.’

Leela had taken a liking to the harried little man.

‘Why?’ she asked. ‘What are you going to do?’

Cordo said determinedly. ‘There is only one thing I can do now. I shall join the Others.’

‘What Others?’ asked the Doctor.

Cordo lowered his voice. ‘It is said they live in the Undercity. Outlaws, tax criminals, even some who have escaped from the Correction Centre. Perhaps they will help me if they exist.’

‘How will you find them?’ asked Leela practically. ‘If you’re not even sure they exist...’

Cordo lowered his voice to a whisper. ‘I know a secret way to the Undercity. My father was a B-grade worker, cleaned the walkways all his life. He stumbled upon the secret. He never dared use it himself, but he passed it on to me.’

The Doctor decided that he didn’t fancy being left to wander the endless corridors of this city – to be caught eventually by an authority that sounded far from sympathetic. ‘We’ll come with you, Cordo.’

Cordo ducked his head. ‘I am gratified, Citizens. But I must warn you, there may be danger.’

‘I’m interested in this Undercity of yours,’ said the Doctor. ‘I always like to get to the bottom of things.’

Leela sighed, realising that once again the Doctor’s insatiable curiosity was leading them straight into danger.

‘Come on, let’s get moving!’

They moved along the corridor, and down a staircase.

‘You don’t understand the worst of it,’ said Cordo as they descended endless stairs. ‘My father said he looked through the hidden entrance once, and there was *no light*.

Nothing!’ Cordo shuddered. ‘It is not possible even to imagine such a thing!’

Leela gave him a puzzled look. ‘No light? You mean it was dark?’

‘What is dark?’ asked Cordo, as though the word meant nothing to him.

Leela frowned. ‘Well, at night – when the sun has set.’

Cordo looked even more baffled and the Doctor said,

‘Perhaps they don’t have a night on this planet, Leela.

That’s why the concept of darkness frightens him so.’

‘That is not possible,’ said Leela positively. ‘Every world must have a night.’

‘Not if the sidereal and axial rotation periods of the planet are the same,’ said the Doctor thoughtfully. ‘Or if there’s more than one sun. Is there more than one sun, Cordo?’

‘There are six,’ said Cordo.

‘Six?’ Even the Doctor was astonished. ‘ *Six* suns – on Pluto?’

‘Everyone knows that. Each Megropolis was given its own sun by the Company.’

‘In-station fusion satellites, I suppose,’ said the Doctor thoughtfully. ‘Galileo would have been impressed.’

They had descended many levels by now, and had reached a gloomier section, tunnels rather than corridors, their walls lined with metal pipes.

Cordo hesitated at the mouth of a darkened side-tunnel.

‘Which way?’ asked the Doctor.

‘It is somewhere down there. A metal grating let into the tunnel floor. It can be lifted up, and there is a ladder beneath...’

‘Come on then,’ said the Doctor briskly, and strode forward.

Cordo hung back. ‘No, I can’t. There is no light in there.

I cannot see.’

‘Your eyes will soon grow accustomed to the darkness,’

said Leela soothingly.

‘I can’t,’ sobbed Cordo. ‘I must turn back.’

‘Too late for that,’ said the Doctor grimly.

Leela looked up and saw that menacing figures had appeared out of the dark tunnel. They were dressed in ragged scraps of clothing, and they carried an ugly assortment of makeshift weapons – spears and knives and clubs, all made from something else, all ugly and potentially very nasty.

‘Keep your hand well away from that knife, Leela,’ said the Doctor quietly. He stepped forward, smiling. ‘How do you do? I am the

Doctor, this is Leela, and that's Cordo.

You, I take it, must be the Others!'

3

The Others

Inside the TARDIS, K9 waited and waited and waited. He wasn't supposed to have such feelings as impatience – he was ruled by logic.

However, K9's brand of logic, based on his recollection of past events, and an extrapolation of future probabilities, told him that the Doctor would land in trouble within a very short time of leaving the TARDIS. He would need K9's remarkable powers to rescue him from the dangers into which his rashness had led him. It was therefore logical that K9 should exercise these powers as soon as possible.

Having worked things out to his own entire satisfaction, K9 operated the remote control system that opened the TARDIS doors and glided outside. He scanned the flat, empty roof. 'Master?' He began to track.

Hade was working when Marn entered his office. Hade was always working, thought Marn reverently. That was why he had attained the eminence of Gatherer.

She. coughed deferentially. 'The tracker system is activated, your honour. It is registering activity.'

Hade looked up. 'So soon? You have done well, Marn.'

Marn blushed with pleasure. 'I am gratified, your honour.' Leaning forward she switched on the monitor on Hade's desk. The picture on the screen showed K9

disconsolately circling the TARDIS.

'What is it?' gasped Marn.

'I shouldn't have to tell you that,' said Hade severely.

'Obviously they're using machines to carry the contraband

– some kind of robot. Very clever!'

Selecting a leaf from a polished wooden box, he nibbled it with sybaritic delicacy.

The Doctor, Leela and Cordo were bustled along the gloomy service tunnels, down through a metal grille in the floor, along more tunnels, even darker and more cramped, and finally down a ladder inside a kind of giant plastic tube that led them into a huge metal chamber. There was light here, though not very much, light from smoking candles and a red glow from the smouldering fire in a primitive metal brazier.

There were men and women here, too, savage-looking ragged figures like the ones who had captured them.

Sprawled in an old chair behind a battered table, close to the glowing fire was one of the ugliest-looking men the Doctor had ever seen in his several lives. He was dressed rather better than the others in a once-elegant white shirt, and a leather jerkin. He had a barrel-like torso, powerful arms and shoulders, and a heavy cruel face, with a shock of tangled hair, and a stubble of beard. The face, like his bare arms and legs, was covered with the knots and lumps of old scar tissue. He looked wild, brutal and indestructible, and he carried a huge coiled whip. 'Well, Goudry,' he growled.

'What have you got there?'

'They were snooping round the service tunnel,' said Goudry eagerly. 'We caught them, Mandrel. I thought you'd want to question them.'

'You didn't catch us,' said the Doctor with some dignity. 'We simply allowed you to escort us here.'

The man called Mandrel surveyed the Doctor and his companions with disfavour. He turned back to Goudry.

'Who are they? Come to that, what are they?'

'I questioned them when we caught them, Mandrel.

They say they're from another planet.'

'There is no life on the other planets,' said Mandrel positively.

'Oh no?' said the Doctor. 'And how many have you visited recently?'

The whip in Mandrel's hand jerked forwards, the lash cracking explosively only inches from the Doctor's nose.

'I'm the leader here,' rumbled Mandrel. 'Let's have a little respect for

my rank, eh? Or I'll cut your skin off, inch by inch.'

The Doctor sighed. 'I can see you and I are going to get on just famously.'

Mandrel studied the little group of newcomers, clearly at a loss what to make of them. 'Where are they from?' he demanded aggrievedly. 'That tall one looks like an Ajack!'

The Doctor turned to Leela. 'Do you think he's insulting me?'

'He wouldn't dare – not with a face like that!'

Mandrel raised his whip, and the Doctor stepped in front of Leela to protect her.

Gently she moved him aside. 'Let him strike me, Doctor

– just once. I'll cut his heart out!'

'We didn't come here to fight,' whispered the Doctor fiercely. Feeling the sentiment deserved a wider airing, he raised his voice and repeated it. 'We didn't come here to fight!'

'Why did you come here?' demanded Mandrel.

The Doctor hesitated. Put like that, it was a difficult question to answer. 'You might say we're just tourists. Our little friend here seemed to need some help.'

Mandrel looked down at Cordo, who was crouched whimpering on the ground, his hands over his eyes. 'The D grade?'

'He wishes to join your tribe,' explained Leela helpfully.

Mandrel jabbed Cordo with his foot. 'Get him up!'

'Leave him alone,' said the Doctor indignantly. 'I'll do it.' Gently he lifted Cordo to his feet. 'Come on, old chap.'

Cordo still had his hands clamped over his eyes. 'Light,'

he whimpered. 'Please, let me see light!'

Brutally Mandrel knocked his hands away. 'There is no light down here, fool. Only that which we make ourselves.'

Goudry chuckles. ‘We could make a few candles out of him, eh Mandrel? About all he’s good for.’

‘Shut up,’ snarled Mandrel. He jabbed Cordo with the handle of his whip. ‘You! What’s your name?’

‘Citizen Cordo, Grade D, District Four,’ said Cordo automatically.

‘Foundry or Smelting?’

‘Just a humble foundry work-unit, your honour,’

babbled Cordo. ‘Always respectable. All my life I met my production quotas, paid my dues and taxes, praise the Company!’

‘Stuff the Company!’ roared Mandrel. ‘Mouth those mindless pieties down here, Cordo, and you’ll end up with your throat split! Now, how did a good little work unit like you get in trouble with the Gatherer, eh?’

‘I couldn’t meet my father’s death taxes,’ said Cordo shakily. ‘It was more than I was told.’ He poured out his story.

‘It’s always been more than they tell you,’ said Mandrel, unsympathetically. ‘I’ve heard the story a thousand times.’

He sank back into his chair. ‘Well, if you want to stay with us, you’ll have to earn your keep.’

‘I’ll work, your honour,’ said Cordo with pathetic eagerness. ‘I’m a good worker, I’ll do anything...’

‘Work?’ snarled Mandrel, as if it was a dirty word.

‘Nobody works down here, Cordo. We go into the upper levels and steal what we need.’

Cordo’s voice was a horrified whisper. ‘Steal?’

‘Yes, and kill, too, if necessary.’

A skinny, ragged woman had been eyeing Leela’s garments enviously. Suddenly she sprang forward, grabbing at the material. ‘It’s skin. Real animal skin!’

Her voice was choked off and she found herself in a painful armlock, the tip of Leela’s knife at her throat.

‘Touch me again and I’ll fillet you,’ said Leela gently, and flung her attacker across the room.

Mandrel gave a bellow of laughter. ‘A handy girl, Doctor. You two may be of more use to us than I thought.’

‘Delighted to hear it,’ said the Doctor cordially. ‘But I’m afraid Leela and I won’t be staying. As I said, we’re simply tourists.’

Mandrel raised his hand, and all around them ragged figures reached for weapons and closed in.

‘On the other hand,’ said the Doctor thoughtfully. ‘It really is very cosy down here. Perhaps we could stay for a while longer.’

‘A wise decision, Doctor,’ said Mandrel. He turned to Leela’s attacker, who was in the process of picking herself up. ‘You Veet! You remember that consumcard?’ He looked thoughtfully at the Doctor. ‘The one we got from that Ajack...’

In itself, tracking the doctor and Leela wasn’t particularly difficult. A bloodhound can register even the faintest of scent traces, and K9’s sensors, keyed as they were to both the Doctor and Leela’s body readings, were far more efficient than any bloodhound’s nose. The trouble was the terrain. Ladders were beyond K9, and even stairs presented almost insoluble difficulties. He had to find a service lift before he could descend from the roof, operate it by remote control, and then cast about for the doctor and Leela’s traces, level by level, all this while avoiding detection.

K9 pressed on with dogged persistence, unaware that his every move was being monitored by Gatherer Hade and the faithful Marn.

Hade peered thoughtfully at the screen, nibbling on a leaf.

‘How I dislike these lower levels. So depressing.’

‘The D and E grades live there,’ said Marn matter-of-factly. ‘They have their dormitories somewhere along here.’

Hade peered at the scurrying metal shape on the screen.

‘It’s turned again. Where is it now?’

Marn leaned forward. ‘It looks like one of the lower service subways, your honour...’

Finally K9 reached the grille that led to the Undercity, and realised that here was an obstacle which he could not overcome. With an electronic whine of disappointment, he glided into a dark corner and settled down to wait.

With swift and delicate touches of her long skinny fingers, the woman Veet was adjusting the coding on a stolen consumcard with a stolen light-stylo. She looked up. 'It is finished.'

Mandrel said heavily. 'And worth a thousand talmars?'

'It is now,' said Veet proudly. 'It will pass.'

'It had better,' said Mandrel grimly. He took the card, and turned to the Doctor. 'A little task for you, doctor.

This is a consumcard we got from a careless Ajack. Thanks to Veet here, it is now made out for a thousand talmars.'

'I see,' said the Doctor thoughtfully. 'First theft, then forgery.'

'Precisely, Doctor. But the card has never been used, so it won't be in the computer records.'

'Why don't you use it yourselves then?'

'We can't, Doctor,' said Goudry. 'We're not respectable enough. None of us looks like an Ajack.'

'Who are the Ajacks?' asked the Doctor. 'After all, if I'm supposed to be one...'

'The Ajacks are all miners. They're a wild, ruffian lot, most of them live in Megropolis Three.' Mandrel handed the card to the Doctor. 'You know how to use a consumcard?'

The Doctor ran his fingers over the little plastic card.

'Computer-coded, micro-loaded. Obviously you feed it into a reader-slot and it gives you credit – or cash.'

'You'd better use the consumbank on subway 37. Your friend Cordo will show you the way.'

The Doctor stood for a moment, turning over the card in his fingers. 'You're asking me to commit a crime.

Suppose I refuse?'

'Then you'll die,' said Mandrel implacably. 'All three of you, here and now.'

The Doctor glanced at Leela, who stood poised, her hand near her knife. She would put up a good fight, and he knew a trick or two himself. But with so many opponents in such a confined space, the end was certain.

The circle of menacing figures began closing in again.

'All right, all right, I'm not refusing,' said the Doctor hurriedly. 'It was just a passing thought!'

'Here's another. for you, Doctor,' said Mandrel. 'Just in case you think of making off with our thousand talmars.'

He snatched out his knife, and made a notch in the side of one of the smoking candles. 'If you're not back by the time the flame burns down to the notch, the girl dies.'

The inspection hatch slid back and the Doctor and Cordo clambered out.

Cordo sighed with relief, looking around the more familiar surroundings. 'I couldn't breathe down there.'

The Doctor nodded, sliding the hatch back into place.

'It was a bit stuffy.' He sniffed thoughtfully. 'Still, at least the air was unscented.' He paused, and sniffed again.

Cordo looked on, puzzled. 'What is it, Doctor?'

'Nothing, just an idea.'

A familiar shape glided out of the shadows, 'Master!'

said K9.

The Doctor frowned down at the little automaton. 'I thought I told you to stay in the TARDIS?'

K9's tail-antenna drooped. But it wagged again when the Doctor bent down and patted his head. 'I'm very glad to see you all the same!'

Marn leaned forward, studying the Doctor's figure on the screen. 'An Ajack by the stamp of him – though he looks a bit eccentric, even for an Ajack.'

'I've seen that other one before,' said Hade thoughtfully.

'The D grade?'

'Yes, of course! He was in this very office, not long ago, whining for time to pay his taxes.'

'They were coming up from the Undercity,' said Marn thoughtfully. 'What would an Ajack want with that riff-raff?'

Hade saw the tall figure say something to the little robot and then move away, trailed by the D grade.

'Quickly,' he snapped. 'Put the tracker on the Ajack.'

'It isn't possible, your honour, not in the time. The tracker system is keyed to follow the machine.'

Hade gave a snarl of disappointment. Already the tall figure and the small one were out of sight. 'We've lost him.'

'We know the general area of the subways he's using,'

said Marn. 'We could send out guards...'

Hade shook his head. 'No, too soon for that. I want to know more about this Ajack. I want to know what he's doing...' He smashed a fist down on his desk. 'By my ledger, Marn, I've got it!'

'Got what, your honour?'

'I know what he must be smuggling – arms!'

'Weapons?' said Marn puzzled.

'They were always an arrogant, unsettled lot, those Ajacks. The air-conditioning isn't as effective in the mines.

If there's ever a rebellion against the Company, it will start among the Ajacks.'

'You think he's smuggling weapons to the Undercity?'

‘Exactly! And if it’s happening here, it’s a talmar to a toffee that it’s happening in every Megropolis on Pluto.’

Marn found the idea of rebellion utterly terrifying.

‘What shall we do?’

Hade leaped up. ‘I must go to the Company Palace and warn the Collector. We shall need his special guards to deal with this – the Inner Retinue!’

The Doctor and Cordo made their way up to the clean, brightly lit corridors of the upper levels. They walked on until they reached a junction and Cordo pointed down a cul-de-sac. There was a glassed-in cubicle at the end.

‘There it is, Doctor.’

The Doctor nodded. ‘All right. You wait here.’ The Doctor marched along the corridor and stepped inside the cubicle which contained a slot, a keyboard and a scanner lens. He produced the card, slipped it into the slot, and pressed the *Enter* button. The machine whirred and clicked. The Doctor smiled winningly up at the lens. In tens, please,’ he said firmly. An electronic alarm filled the corridor with a high-pitched shriek, and an armoured glass shutter slid down behind him, cutting off his escape.

Yellow gas hissed from hidded vents into the cubicle, and the Doctor slid choking to the ground.

4

The Collector

Cordo looked in horror at the Doctor slumped unconscious in the bottom of the booth. He took an involuntary step forward and then checked himself. What could he do?

Nothing – except get caught himself.

Black uniformed, black-helmeted Company guards came pounding along the corridor and Cordo flattened himself against the wall. They thundered past, ignoring him, their attention concentrated on the figure in the booth.

Cordo turned and ran.

The guards halted beside the booth and their Captain unlocked a control panel. He pushed a button and the vents reversed their flow, sucking the gas from the cubicle.

He touched another, and the armoured glass shutter slid back. Two guards came forward, bundled the Doctor onto a stretcher and swiftly carried him away.

Mandrel picked up the marked candle and examined it carefully. The candle flame had burned very near to his knife-cut by now. He leaned back in his chair, looking across at Leela. 'Your friend the Doctor had better hurry.'

Leela was leaning against the wall. She shrugged, apparently unconcerned.

Veet said viciously, 'Mandrel, when you kill her, try not to damage her too much.'

'What a tender heart,' said Mandrel mockingly. Again, he looked at Leela. 'Full of love and compassion, our little Veet. See how she begs for a gentle death for you!'

'Love and compassion nothing,' snarled Veet. 'I want those skins and I don't want them damaged.'

Leela gave her a tigerish smile. 'Before I die, I'll see this rat-hole ankle-deep in blood. That is a promise!'

Goudry who was standing next to her, gulped and backed away. Turning to the man beside him he whispered, 'By the Company, I think she means it.'

His companion nodded. 'I tell you this – if Mandrel does order her to be killed, I won't be the first to attack!'

The Collector's office was an extraordinary place. If Hade's office was the board-room, the Collector's was the nerve-centre. Like the Collector, it was all business, resembling nothing so much as the inside of a giant adding machine.

Computer terminals lined the walls and the Collector's huge curved desk was built into the computer system.

Print-out spewed periodically from the machine on the left, to be studied, annotated, and fed into a slot on the right.

The Collector himself was even more extraordinary. To begin with he was tiny, almost a dwarf, with a huge bald head that seemed meant for a much larger man.

He wore the traditional pinstripe reserved for those of highest rank. It was a severe one-piece garment in navy blue with thin white stripes, a square of white cloth in the breast pocket. Its origins were lost in antiquity, although it was believed that the costume dated back to the days of Old Earth.

The Collector crouched in a huge wheeled chair behind his desk. Since his nose was always a few inches from the computer print-outs and calculator control consoles that covered his desk, visitors usually found themselves addressing the dome of the great bald head.

Hade bustled into the room, and bowed low. The Collector ignored him.

'Your Highness, a thousand pardons for this intrusion,'

began Hade.

'Don't delay me, Hade,' snapped the Collector. 'Time is money.'

'What a great truth, your Excellency,' said Hade reverently. 'What a pearl of wisdom!'

'Get to the point!'

Hade cleared his throat, and nerved himself to speak.

'Your Eminence, I have grounds for believing that there is a conspiracy among the Ajacks to foment an armed rebellion in the Undercity. Glory be to the Company!'

To Hade's astonishment, the Collector actually looked up. 'Interesting, Hade. What exactly do you know?'

The Doctor opened his eyes to find himself on what appeared to be an operating table. He tried to move, and found himself completely helpless, trussed up in a kind of strait-jacket. His hands were firmly fastened behind him –

all he could manage to do was wiggle his fingers. Turning his head he saw a second operating table close to his own.

On it lay another man, trussed up like the Doctor. He wore coveralls

rather like Cordo's, pale blue not yellow, with the Sunmakers' symbol. He had a shrewd, intelligent face, and he was watching the Doctor thoughtfully.

The Doctor tried to say 'Hello', but managed only a kind of croak.

'Don't try to talk yet my friend,' said the man soothingly. 'Balarium gas affects the throat.'

The Doctor looked round the room. Its walls were lined with a lot of peculiarly sinister-looking electronic equipment.

His fellow-prisoner said, 'Let me answer some of your questions before you ask them! My name is Bisham, and like you I am a prisoner, awaiting treatment at the Correction Centre. This is the Induction Therapy sector.

They sensitise areas of the brain, clear the neural pathways, so when we arrive in Physical we get the full benefit –

apparently the treatment intensifies pain a thousand times.'

'Mer, mer *moo*!' said the Doctor trying out his voice.

'How long have we been here?'

'They brought you in when the sirens were sounding second workshift... must have been about an hour ago.'

'An hour,' said the Doctor softly. In his mind's eye he could see the smoking candle with the knife-mark some way down. It would take about an hour for the flame to burn down to the mark, he thought. He let his head fall back, staring up at the ceiling. 'Thank you.'

'It's a pleasure,' said Bisham politely.

The candle flame reached the mark, and Mandrel rose menacingly to his feet. 'Your time is up, girl.'

Suddenly Leela's knife was in her hand. She stood poised, waiting.

'Seize her!' roared Mandrel.

He grabbed the nearest man and shoved him towards Leela. The man raised his club and sprang forward. Leela caught his upraised arm with her free hand and spun him across the room. He slammed into the wall and collapsed groaning.

‘That was a warning,’ said Leela softly. ‘The next one dies.’

Nobody moved.

‘Take her, you cowardly scabs,’ roared Mandrel. ‘Must I do it myself?’

The rest of his band seemed to think this an excellent idea.

‘Why don’t you try, Mandrel?’ invited Leela. ‘Prove you’ve got a heart as big as your mouth!’

‘Maybe we should wait a little longer,’ suggested Veet.

‘Give this Doctor a little more time.’

‘Maybe Cordo lost his way,’ said Goudry. ‘He probably took the wrong subway. These D grades are none too bright.’

‘You craven-gutted factory fodder,’ growled Mandrel.

‘Are you all frightened of a girl?’

Apparently they were. At any rate, no one moved. They just looked at Mandrel.

Realising his prestige was at stake, Mandrel lunged forwards, striking at Leela with his whip.

Leela ducked, the whip passed harmlessly over her head, and her knife slashed at Mandrel’s throat.

He jumped back, only just in time, attacked again, and was sent staggering by a savage high-kick from Leela.

Throwing aside his whip, Mandrel drew his knife, and the two opponents circled each other, looking for an opening.

The duel was interrupted by the sudden arrival of Cordo, who almost fell down the ladder and into the room.

‘The Doctor,’ he gasped. ‘They’ve got the Doctor!’

Mandrel dragged him to his feet. ‘What happened?’

‘Something went wrong at the consumbank. I don’t know, perhaps the card was faulty.’

‘Veet,’ said Mandrel threateningly.

Veet backed away. ‘The card was perfect.’

‘The alarm blew as soon as he tried to use it. He didn’t stand a chance. I had to run for it.’

‘It must have been his own fault,’ insisted Veet. ‘The card had never been used.’

Leela said urgently. ‘What happened to the Doctor, Cordo?’

‘Security picked him up, right away. They must have been patrolling in the area.’

‘What will they do to him?’

It was Goudry who answered. ‘He’ll be in the Correction Centre by now. They don’t waste time, not when it’s defrauding the consumbank.’

Mandrel nodded his agreement. ‘That’s high crime, that is.’

‘Your Doctor friend will get the maximum,’ said Veet maliciously.

‘Maximum what?’

‘Maximum Correction, of course. That’s what the Correction Centre is for, correcting people. He won’t live long under that!’

For the moment the Doctor was very much alive and kicking – literally as it happened. Frantically waving his legs in the air, he managed first to sit up, and then to struggle down from the operating table. He began moving laboriously around the room, studying the apparatus that lined the walls.

Bisham watched him inquisitively. ‘What are you doing?’

‘Just taking a hop – good for the circulation. Why are you in here, anyway?’

‘Curiosity,’ said Bisham grimly.

‘That’s a crime here?’

‘I was an executive grade at the Chemical Plant, in charge of PCM production. I got curious about some of our other products.’

‘Go on.’

‘There were certain tablets, for use by the top grades only – Gatherers and above. I worked out they were antidotes to the PCM. So I tried them,’ Bisham paused, struggling for words. ‘I felt completely different, as though I was alive for the very first time.’

‘And you kept on using them?’

‘Naturally! I suppose they noticed the difference in me, and kept watch. The Megro-guards came for me during my last sleep-time.’

While Bisham talked, the Doctor had been turning round; with his back to the wall, he used the fingers of his bound hands to tug a jack-plug from its socket and re-locate it in another one. Power dials began to flicker. The Doctor smiled grimly, hopped back to his table and swung himself back up on it. ‘What does PCM stand for?’

‘Pento cyleinic-methyl-hydrane. You know something of chemistry?’

‘Enough to know an anxiety-inducing agent when I smell one. That’s the stuff that’s in the air, isn’t it?’

‘They say it eliminates air-born infections.’

The Doctor lay back, staring thoughtfully at the ceiling.

‘That’s what they tell you. But, really, it eliminates freedom.’

When Hade finished his account of the suspected conspiracy, the Collector said viciously, ‘These Undercity cellar-dwellers should be *erased*!’

‘Indubitably, your Elevation,’ agreed Hade obsequiously. ‘Unfortunately it is a matter of manpower – I haven’t sufficient staff.’

‘It is against Company policy to give supportive aid to the civil administration,’ grumbled the Collector. ‘We run an essentially fiscal operation. Tax, and tax alone is what concerns us.’

‘Quite so, your pinnacle. But a 5 per cent increase in protection tax would more than repay the Company – its name be praised.’

‘Good thinking, Hade. You tempt me.’

‘There is also the fact that any sustained unrest among the work-units could seriously damage profitability,’ added Hade, playing his trump

card.

The Collector nodded his great bald head agitatedly.

‘Productivity-wise I agree that an on-going insurrection situation would be unacceptable to management. This fiscal period, we are aiming for a 7 per cent increase in the gross planetary product.’

‘Such a target, your Colossus, is achievable only if there is no serious disruption. With additional manpower, I could locate and destroy these anti-Company agents before real harm is done.’

The Collector considered a moment then snapped, ‘Half a division of my Inner Retinue. It’s all I can spare.’

Hade bowed low. ‘I am gratified.’

‘And have the daily PCM dosage increased 3 per cent by volume. This interview is terminated.’

The Collector’s head bowed over his desk and he resumed his ceaseless calculations.

Hade backed away, intoning the Ritual of Farewell.

This like the Collector’s pin-stripe, dated back to the great days of Old Earth. ‘I-have-the-honour-to-remain-sir-your-most-humble-and-obedient servant-yours-etc...’

Leela glared angrily at Mandrel’s shifty-looking band.

‘What kind of men are you?’

‘The kind that want to live,’ muttered Mandrel.

If just six of you would come with me, we could raid this Correction Centre and free the Doctor.’ ‘Why should we risk our necks for him?’

‘You sent him to the consumbank with a useless card.

And now he’s in trouble, you won’t even try to help him.’

Goudry shuffled his feet. ‘There’s nothing we can do.’

‘How do you know when you won’t even try?’

‘Listen, girl,’ snarled Mandrel. ‘The Correction Centre is right under

the Palace itself.'

'What Palace?'

'The Collector's Palace,' said Veet. 'Where the Collector lives. They say he likes to hear the screams – that's why the Correction Centre's where it is!'

'And that's why we won't raid it,' said Mandrel. 'The Palace is guarded by the Inner Retinue, and they've got blasters. What have we got?'

'Nothing,' said Leela contemptuously. 'No pride, no courage, no manhood. Even animals will fight to protect their own. You say you want to live? If you stay skulking in this black pit while the Doctor dies, you live without honour.'

'Somebody silence the termagant,' groaned Mandrel.

'She's mad!'

'I want six of you to come with me,' said Leela. 'Now, who among you is a true man?' She turned to Goudry.

'You?'

He looked away. 'As Mandrel says–the guards are armed.'

Leela looked around the circle. 'You? You – or you?

Anybody?'

There was no reply. 'I see. None of you. Then I will go alone.'

Cordo stepped forward. 'I will come.'

Leela was astonished. 'You, Cordo?'

'I don't suppose I'll be much help. I'm not brave and I can't fight. But at least I can show you the way.'

'You are the bravest man here, Cordo,' said Leela. 'Let us find the Doctor.' Turning her back contemptuously on Mandrel and his band, she led the way out of the chamber.

A little shamefacedly, Mandrel let them go. He sank back in his chair. 'Fools, both of them. An hour from now, they'll both be dead... if they're lucky.'

5

The Reprieve

In the Correction Centre, the Doctor was passing the time by questioning Bisham. ‘Tell me, what method do they use to spread the PCM through the atmosphere?’

‘It’s a high-pressure system. The PCM is volatilised through the vapour towers and fed into the air-conditioning system – ’ Bisham broke off as a uniformed technician came into the room.

The Doctor raised his head. ‘And about time too! Do you know how long we’ve been waiting here?’

The technician ignored him. He took a metal helmet from a rack on the wall, and began fitting it on Bisham’s head. The helmet was connected to the main power system by a flexible arm.

The Doctor looked at Bisham. ‘Is the man deaf–or hasn’t he learned to speak yet?’

Bisham said, ‘We don’t exist as far as he’s concerned, not as people anyway. We’re just material for processing.’

The Doctor nodded. ‘I see. I’m glad he isn’t deaf, all the same. I would have felt guilty.’

Bisham gave him a puzzled look – then suddenly remembered the time the Doctor had spent fiddling with the equipment.

The technician began fitting a second helmet over the Doctor’s head.

‘Don’t leave me in too long, there’s a good chap,’ said the Doctor plaintively. ‘My hair goes all frizzy!’

Still there was no response.

‘It was pleasant meeting you, Doctor,’ said Bisham. ‘I’m sorry our acquaintance has to be so brief.’

‘We must have another talk later on,’ said the Doctor cheerfully. ‘I’m sure there’s a lot you can tell me.’

‘I doubt if I’ll be able to tell you anything after this,’

said Bisham sadly. ‘Goodbye, Doctor.’

Impassively the technician threw a switch, and the control bank to which the helmets were linked began throbbing with power. He reached for the switch which would activate the helmets and the Doctor said quietly, 'I wouldn't do that if I were you.'

Something in the Doctor's voice got through to the man, and for the first time he looked at the two prisoners.

He hesitated for a moment, then stretched out his hand for the switch.

'I said I wouldn't do that if I were you,' repeated the Doctor.

The technician threw the switch and the control bank overloaded. The technician's body went rigid. For a moment he hung on to the switch, his shuddering body outlined in blue flame. Then the console blew up, flinging his across the room.

The Doctor looked sadly down at the body. 'I did try to warn him. Perhaps he was deaf after all!'

'Detained?' screamed Hade. 'When was this? Where? By whose orders?'

Marn stared at him in consternation. She had come to tell Hade of the Doctor's arrest, expecting that he would be pleased. Instead her news had provoked this explosion of rage. 'He was caught committing fraud with a stolen consumcard,' she stammered. 'The Megro-guards took him to Correction.'

Hade paced uneasily up and down his magnificent office. 'It's too soon, Marn. We can squeeze the name of his accomplices out of him, but I don't suppose he knows everyone in the conspiracy. Most of them must be executive grades, or even higher. If they hear he's been arrested they'll take fright, move to other Megropolises.

We could be years tracking them all down.'

'So at the moment, this Ajack is our only lead, your honour?'

'Precisely, Marn. Have him released at once.'

Marn was stunned. No one was ever released from Correction. 'Released? What reason shall I give?'

'Go there yourself. Tell them Gatherer Hade orders the charge to be quashed. Then bring the man here, to me.'

‘But what will you do with him, your honour?’

Hade smiled. ‘We shall lull his suspicions... I have a plan.’

As Leela came up the ladder from the Undercity, K9

glided joyfully forward. ‘Mistress!’

‘K9!.What are you doing here?’

‘I am waiting, Mistress.’

‘Waiting? For what?’

‘The Doctor ordered me to stay.’

‘He ordered you to stay in the TARDIS,’ said Leela severely. ‘You should not be here at all.’

‘Affirmative,’ said K9 blandly.

Cordo came up the ladder and stopped short at the sight of K9.

‘K9, this is Cordo,’ said Leela. ‘Cordo, this is K9.’ ‘I’ve seen it before,’ said Cordo. ‘When I was with the Doctor.

Er – what is it?’

‘Well, he’s – he’s a sort of friend.’

‘Affirmative. Friend,’ said K9.

Leela looked down at the little automaton. ‘K9, are your batteries fully charged?’

‘Affirmative, Mistress. All systems are at maximum function.’

‘Then you’d better come with us– I think we might need you.’

Leela set off, new hope in her heart. With K9 on their side perhaps they had a chance after all...

From his position on the operating table, the Doctor watched two technicians who were struggling to repair the blown-out control bank.

Bisham was on the table beside him. Both were still trussed up in their strait-jackets, though to the Doctor’s relief the now-useless helmets had been removed.

‘I wonder how long it ‘will take them to fix it?’ said Bisham.

‘Rather longer than it took me to unfix it,’ said the Doctor with some satisfaction. He raised his voice. ‘Hey, you two! You don’t need to hurry on our account, you know. Have a tea-break or something. How about a jelly baby? I’ve got some in my pocket.’ There was no reply.

The door opened and a severe-looking young woman came in, attending by another technician. She looked at the Doctor, then at Bisham, then pointed to the Doctor.

‘This is the one. Release him.’

To the Doctor’s astonishment, the technician heaved him out into a sitting position and began unfastening the strait-jacket.

‘Thank you,’ said the Doctor as he struggled out of the cumbersome garment. ‘I didn’t really feel it was me, you know. I like a coat with plenty of pockets.’ He stretched, and looked curiously at the young woman. ‘What’s the next treat going to be, then? And what’s your name?’

‘I am Marn, assistant to Gatherer Hade. He wishes to see you.’

‘Who’s Gatherer Hade?’

Marn looked shocked. ‘It is Gatherer Hade who ordered your release.’

‘Oh, *the* Gatherer Hade!’ said the Doctor hurriedly.

‘That’s different! What about my friend here?’

Marn shook her head. ‘Just you. Come. The Gatherer is waiting.’

With an apologetic look at Bisham, the Doctor followed her from the room.

Cordo led Leela and K9 along the gloomy lower-level tunnels. He came to a halt and pointed. ‘The entrance is by the next turn, about fifty yards. There’s a guard at the gate.’

‘You’re sure there’s only one?’

Cordo shrugged. ‘It’s a rear entrance. I have seen two guards but mostly there’s only one.’

Leela hesitated, peering along the tunnel. Something was puzzling her

– something about her own reactions.

Usually the prospect of battle filled her with fierce joy.

Now she felt uneasy, almost frightened.

She shivered, looking down at K9. ‘It is strange. I feel –

fear. Why should I be frightened?’

‘There is a chemical inhibitor in the atmosphere, Mistress. I have analysed it with my sensors.’

‘What do you mean, K9?’

‘It makes you feel fear because it affects the human nervous system and debilitates the will.’

Leela sniffed. Even in these lower tunnels the air carried the same faint but cloying scent. ‘You mean there is something in the air – something that makes me feel afraid?’

‘Affirmative, Mistress.’

Leela nodded, satisfied. If the fear was not the result of her own weakness, but of some magic of her enemies, then she would simply disregard it. ‘Right,’ she said determinedly. ‘Come on.’ They set off down the tunnel.

The doorway to the Correction Centre was set in the tunnel wall and, as Cordo predicted, a solitary guard patrolled outside.

‘All right, K9,’ whispered Leela. ‘Bite him!’

‘Mistress?’

‘You know what I mean. Stun him. Shoot him down!’

K9 glided forward.

The guard stared in utter astonishment at the strange metal apparition trundling towards him.

K9 went on advancing until the guard began looking alarmed, and reached for his blaster. K9 halted, wagging his tail-antenna disarmingly. Deciding that the strange apparition probably wasn’t dangerous, the guard took his hand off his blaster, and reached for his

belt-communicator

– and collapsed in a heap as K9 promptly shot him down.

Leela and Cordo came up at a run. Pausing only to snatch the blaster from the guard's belt, Leela led the way into the Correction Centre.

Marn showed the Doctor into Gatherer Hade's office, and Hade rose to meet him, bowing obsequiously. 'Ah, Citizen!

Come in! Sit down, Citizen...'

'Doctor,' said the Doctor.

'Do sit down.'

Tucking his long legs under him, the Doctor sat, and Hade said affably, 'Citizen – Doctor, eh? Unusual name.'

'Isn't it?' agreed the Doctor blandly. 'Especially for an Ajack.'

Hade said tolerantly. 'Well, with so many Wurgs and Keeks in Megropolis Three, I sometimes wonder how my respected colleague Gatherer Pyle keeps track of you all.'

The Doctor smiled and said nothing, studying the fantastically overdressed figure before him. A senior bureaucrat, he guessed, cunning and experienced, status-conscious, but without the strength to wield real power.

There would be someone behind Gatherer Hade, someone far tougher, and far more intelligent.

Hade cleared his throat. 'Well now, I trust you have suffered no ill-affects from your unfortunate experience?'

'Not at all, not at all,' said the Doctor airily. 'Your guards were charming, most attentive.' Smiling amiably, he sat and waited for the next move, wondering why he had been released, why he was being shown all this courtesy. Something very sinister was going on.

'I am gratified,' said Hade formally. 'I have brought you here, Citizen Doctor, to apologise for the computer error which caused you so much inconvenience – and of course to give you the thousand talmars you requested.' He passed the Doctor a plastic wallet, stuffed with notes, and smiled expansively. 'Still, to err is computer –'

'– and to forgive is fine!' completed the Doctor, taking the wallet and thrusting it carelessly into a pocket. There was a rather awkward silence.

Marn, who had been hovering at Hade's shoulder, had a sudden inspiration. Glancing at Hade for permission, she picked up a polished wooden box and held it out to the Doctor. 'Would you care for a leaf, Citizen Doctor?'

The Doctor peered into the box, took a leaf and examined it thoughtfully. 'Ah Rubus Idaeus!' He nibbled it.

'No, raspberry leaves,' said Hade, who was unfamiliar with Latin. 'I have them specially imported, you know.' He took a leaf and nibbled it delicately. 'They contain natural chlorophyl. Very healthy!'

'You should try raspberry-leaf tea,' suggested the Doctor. 'It's very good for ailments of the throat.'

'Indeed? Of course, in primitive times on Old Earth they ate considerable quantities of vegetable matter without any apparent harm to their systems.'

'Remarkable!' said the Doctor politely, wondering where all this chat was leading them. Was it just some kind of softening-up technique – the illusion of freedom, followed rapidly by more threats and torture?

Hade babbled on. 'I'm something of a student of antiquity. You know, many people aren't even aware that our species originated on Old Earth.'

'I can hardly credit it.'

Hade shook his head sadly. 'Sometimes it seems they teach them nothing in the Preparation Centres these days.'

'I often wonder why we left Old Earth at all,' said the Doctor solemnly.

'Well, of course there's the theological view,' said Hade.

'But I've always inclined to the expansionist theory myself, natural progression. Are you planning to stay long in Megropolis One, Doctor?'

'Not long,' said the Doctor evenly. Was he free or wasn't he?

‘While you’re here you should try to get about a little.

After all, this is the first, and therefore the oldest city on Pluto.’

The Doctor decided to put things to the test. He stood up. ‘I shall certainly take your advice. In fact, I shall start now!’

‘Then I mustn’t detain you any longer,’ said Hade. ‘I know you visiting executives always have a busy schedule.

A most pleasant meeting!’

‘Humbug,’ said the Doctor vigorously.

Hade bowed. ‘I am gratified. Show Citizen Doctor out, Marn!’

The Doctor marched out, and Hade sat studying his fingernails, waiting for Marn to return.

Minutes later, she came back into the room. ‘He has gone, your honour. The tracker system is keyed to his movements.’

Hade rubbed his hands. ‘Excellent! I think he swallowed my story of machine error without suspicion, eh Marn?’

Marn bowed her head, lost in admiration of the Gatherer’s cunning. ‘He could scarcely believe his luck!

And when you gave him a thousand talmars – that was a touch of genius, your honour.’

Hade preened himself. ‘It added a touch of verisimilitude, I thought! Also he obviously needs money for some particular purpose – possibly to buy the services of those work-shy scum in the Undercity. Let’s see where he’s heading!’

He switched on his monitor, and they saw the tall figure of the Doctor, strolling apparently aimlessly along one of the upper corridors. ‘Excellent,’ said Hade. ‘He will lead us to his fellow conspirators – and when we are ready, we shall strike, and trap them all!’

6

The Trap

The Doctor strolled throughtfully along the deserted corridors – deserted, he guessed, because everyone else was hard at work. The

concept of leisure didn't seem to exist on Megropolis One. He looked suspiciously at a hurrying figure some way behind him. Was he being followed? But even as the Doctor watched, the man turned down a side-junction and disappeared.

The Doctor rubbed his chin, pondering his next move.

Clearly he was under some form of surveillance, probably on some kind of electronic scanner. He would just have to elude it. The first thing was to discover what had happened to Leela. The candle flame would have reached the mark long ago – but the Doctor had great faith in Leela's talent for survival.

He walked on until he found a shabby-looking service stairway, and hurried down it.

Leela was leading her little band of raiders through the corridors of the Correction Centre. By now they had.

penetrated some way inside, apparently undetected. She halted as she saw three motionless figures waiting outside a closed door some way down the corridor. 'What about those three?'

Cordo said, 'It's all right, they are waiting to be erased.'

'What do you mean?'

Cordo looked at her in puzzlement. 'It's their death day.'

'You mean they are to be killed.'

'Erased,' said Cordo, who preferred the proper terminology.

'Why?'

'When work-units become too ill or too old to meet their output quotas, they are erased, and their body material is redeployed,' said Cordo matter-of-factly. 'It is called business economy.'

'I call it murder,' said Leela. Life was cheap enough as far as she was concerned, and death in battle an everyday hazard, but this casual acceptance of planned extermination made her skin crawl. 'Why don't they fight?'

'No one fights the Company,' said Cordo. 'Come on, they won't bother us. Their lives are over.'

The three figures didn't even look up as Leela and Cordo and K9 went by.

K9 who was tracking the Doctor's passage went up to a door. 'This one?' asked Leela eagerly. 'Negative.' K9

trundled to another door.

'Here?' asked Leela

'Affirmative. The Master has recently passed through this entrance.'

'Ready, Cordo?' said Leela.

Cordo nodded. He stabbed at the door control, the door slid open and Leela burst through, the others close behind her.

A figure in a strait-jacket lay on an operating table.

There was a metal helmet on its head, and a uniformed attendant was studying dials and gauges.

There was something chilling about the institutionalised cruelty of the scene, and Leela blasted the attendant down without hesitation. She sprang to the table, wrenched the helmet from the man's head, and stared indignantly down at him. 'You are not the Doctor.'

Painfully the man said, 'Gratified, Citizens. No, I am not the Doctor – my name is Bisham.'

'Watch the door, K9. Cordo help me free this one!'

Cordo and Leela helped the prisoner out of his strait-jacket.

'Do you know where the Doctor is?' demanded Leela.

Bisham wriggled his arms free. 'You are his friends?'

'Yes. You have seen him?'

'He was here. But they set him free.'

'Who did?' asked Leela fiercely. 'Where is he now?'

Bisham shrugged. 'No idea. One of the Gatherer's officials came for him.'

‘We must go Leela,’ said Cordo urgently. ‘The longer we are here, the greater the danger.’

‘Yes, all right. K9, check the corridor.’

‘Affirmative.’ K9 poked his head outside the door. Leela turned to Bisham who was stretching his cramped limbs.

‘Are you able to travel?’

‘I think so. The treatment had only just started when you arrived.’

‘Corridor clear, Mistress,’ reported K9.

Leela turned to Bisham. ‘You’d better come with us.’

Bisham nodded. ‘Anywhere’s better than here!’ They set off down the corridor.

The Doctor’s figure was no longer on the monitor screen in Hade’s office.

‘We have lost him, your honour,’ said Marn apprehensively. ‘He has returned to the Undercity and the tracker system does not operate down there.’

‘No matter if we lose him underground for an hour or so,’ said Hack complacently. ‘We can locate him as soon as he returns to the upper city.’

‘But your honour, it is in the Undercity that the rebellion is festering.’

‘I am well aware of that, Marn,’ said Hade sharply. ‘The Collector himself has allotted me half a division of his Inner Retinue. Picked troops, Marn, the elite of the guards.

They will soon deal with that leaderless rabble. I shall send a squad through the heating conduits to force them into the open. The other section will pick them off as they emerge.’

‘Your honour is a tactical genius.’

Hade gave a self-satisfied smile. ‘I evolved the plan on the way back from the Collector’s Palace. I call it Morton’s Fork, in honour of one of my illustrious predecessors.’

‘Shall I alert the guards, your honour?’

‘Not yet, Marn, not yet,’ said Hade loftily. ‘Morton’s Fork will stab only when we are sure we have identified all the conspirators, high *and* low. And for that we need the help of Citizen Doctor!’

Mandrel swallowed a mouthful of stew and spat it out again. ‘This is garbage!’ he roared.

Veet jumped back. ‘Don’t you like it, Mandrel?’

‘ *Like* it? Which rubbish-can did you scrape it from?’

Veet shuffled away. Her efforts as cook seldom met with much appreciation.

‘Listen,’ said Goudry suddenly. ‘Someone’s coming down the ladder!’

They grabbed their weapons, waiting tensely – and the Doctor appeared at the top of the ladder.

Nimbly he climbed down. ‘Supper-time I see? Have you saved me some?’

Goundry stared blankly at him. ‘We heard you’d been captured.’

‘I was. But apparently it was all a mistake. The Gatherer was most apologetic about it. He even gave me the thousand talmars.’ The Doctor slapped the wallet down on the table.

Mandrel stared at the bulging wallet as if it was a bomb.

‘What trick is this?’

‘No trick,’ said the Doctor cheerfully. ‘I got a raspberry leaf as well! Where’s Leela?’

‘Gone,’ growled Mandrel, and turned away.

‘Gone where?’

Goudry said, ‘We heard you were in the Correction Centre. She had some wild idea about getting you out.’

The Doctor looked hard at Mandrel, ‘I hope he’s telling the truth. You made certain threats before I left. If I discover you’ve harmed Leela, I’ll be very upset.’

Despite the mildness of the Doctor’s words, something in his voice

froze Mandrel's blood.

With an effort he recovered himself. 'Don't you threaten me, Doctor,' he roared. He pointed to the wallet. 'The Gatherer doesn't give anyone money. He takes, but he never gives. I think you're a spy! A spy for the Gatherer!'

Mandrel's band closed in menacingly, and the Doctor groaned wearily. It was frying pan into fire again – and he'd jumped in this particular fire himself.

By some miracle, Leela, Cordo, Bisham and K9 reached the door by which they'd entered without resistance. But when they reached it the stunned guard was gone.

'We should have killed him,' said Leela dispassionately.

'He will raise the alarm.'

Cordo looked up and down the corridor. 'They'll search the whole area. If we're caught in this corridor we'll have no chance, Leela.'

'What must we do?'

'We must be daring,' decided Cordo. 'We'll escape by the main P45 route. They'll never expect to find us there.'

'I hope you're right,' said Bisham grimly. 'Still, it's a chance!'

'Lead the way, Cordo,' said Leela.

Cordo led them at a swift trot through the maze of passages, and finally into a long arrow-straight tunnel, the P45. They ran swiftly along the tunnel which was so completely featureless that it was hard to feel you were making any progress.

Leela saw movement in the distance ahead and stopped, shading her eyes with her hand. 'Guards up ahead. They've blocked the subway.'

'We'll have to turn back,' said Cordo. 'We passed a level interchange not long ago. We can work our way round them.'

Wearily they turned, and began running back the way they had come. Suddenly Leela stopped in horror. An extraordinary vehicle was speeding silently towards them.

It was a long, low-slung truck moving on enormous wheels.

Blaster-cannon were mounted on the front, crammed with black-helmeted, blaster-carrying guards.

'It's a guard cruiser,' said Cordo despairingly. 'We're trapped!'

7

The Rebels

Cordo stared at the advancing cruiser, hypnotised by fear –

but Leela was already planning her attack. A thick pipe ran along the base of the wall creating a shadowy area underneath. Leela pointed. 'K9, get under there.'

'Mistress.' Obediently, K9 glided out of sight.

Leela turned to the others. 'Keep still, both of you. It must look as if we're giving up without a fight.'

'You still have the guard's blaster, Leela,' said Cordo.

'Why don't you kill us?

'What?'

'Better to die quickly, here and now, than let them take us.' Leela shook her head. Nothing was further from her thoughts than suicide – or surrender.

Before she could reply, the guard cruiser was upon them. It stopped a few yards away, its blaster-cannon covering the little group. A harsh voice shouted,

'Surrender your weapons!'

Leela tossed her blaster on the ground, just in front of the cruiser. Cordo and Bisham raised their hands to show they were unarmed.

The guards climbed out of their cruiser and moved cautiously towards them, blaster-rifles levelled.

'K9! Get them!' shouted Leela.

Suddenly K9 emerged from his hiding place and shot down the nearest guard. Astonished, the second man turned, raising his blaster. K9 fired first, and the guard staggered back and fell.

‘Satisfactory, Mistress?’

‘Get their blasters,’ ordered Leela. Cordo and Bisham took the weapons from the fallen guards. Leela snatched up the blaster she had just thrown down.

‘Satisfactory, Mistress?’ repeated K9, who didn’t like his efforts to go unappreciated.

‘Yes, yes, K9, what do you want, a biscuit?’ Leela turned to Cordo and Bisham. ‘Quickly, put K9 on the back and get inside!’

They lifted K9 on to the cruiser, facing backwards so that he could act as rear-gunner, then jumped in themselves.

Leela was studying the blaster-cannon mounted on the front. ‘We will take this machine, and smash through the checkpoint. I shall drive it!’

The checkpoint was in charge of the Guard Commander himself, a tough experienced veteran. So great was the length of the tunnel that all he could make out was the distant shape of the cruiser, and the figures moving around it. ‘Well, the shooting’s stopped, our lads must have got them all,’ he said confidently. ‘Pity they didn’t leave some for us – not our lucky day!’

‘Everyone ready?’ called Leela. ‘Forward!’.She touched a control, and the cruiser shot backwards up the tunnel for several feet then stopped. Leela thumped the control panel.

‘I said forward, curse you!’

‘Perhaps I’d better drive,’ said Bisham hurriedly. He replaced Leela at the controls, and the cruiser sped forward.

Confident the danger was over, the checkpoint guards were taking down the barrier.

‘Cruiser’s coming back,’ said the Commander after a moment. Since they’d been expecting the cruiser anyway, the guards went on with their work. By the time the Commander realised that the cruiser speeding towards him was carrying some very strange passengers, the barrier was almost completely down.

‘Look out!’ yelled the Commander suddenly, but it was too late. The cruiser stormed past them in a hail of blaster fire, sending the remnants of the barrier flying. Leela, Cordo, Bisham and K9 were all

blazing away enthusiastically. The astonished guards jumped to one side. As the cruiser shot past the barrier, Leela yelled,

'We've done it!'

She scrambled to the rear to help K9. By now the guards were firing back. Suddenly Leela slumped forwards, falling from the cruiser.

'Stop!' shouted Cordo. 'Leela's hit!'

By now they were moving at top speed, and it took Bisham several seconds to slow down and stop. He turned and looked behind him. Leela was lying in a crumpled heap, some little way past the checkpoint, and the guards were running towards her. She was very much nearer the checkpoint than the cruiser. Even if he reversed, there was no chance of reaching her first.

The guards opened fire on the stolen cruiser and blaster bolts whipped past Bisham's head, blowing chunks of stone from the tunnel wall.

'We can't help her now,' he said grimly, and drove on at top speed.

Sadly Cordo and K9 watched as Leela's body receded into the distance.

Mandrel pulled a short metal bar from the burning brazier and studied the end. It glowed dull red in the gloom of the underground chamber. 'Soon, Doctor, you will be only too eager to answer my questions.' He shoved the bar back into the fire.

'Will I?' said the Doctor calmly. 'Oh, good!'

He had been thrust into Mandrel's chair, a circle of hostile and suspicious faces all around him.

Mandrel picked up the wallet and slapped it down on the table. 'Right! Why did the Gatherer give you this money?'

'Maybe he liked my face!'

Mandrel leaned over him threateningly. 'You know what I think?'

'Aha! That's a trick question, isn't it? With a brain the size of yours, you probably don't think at all.'

'Listen,' growled Mandrel. 'We can do this the easy way

_’

‘Or we can do it the hard way,’ concluded the Doctor wearily. ‘Yes, I know, I’ve heard all this before. I’ve been threatened by experts!’

‘You really expect me to believe that the Gatherer gave you a thousand talmars to give to us?’

‘Well, he certainly gave them to me. Even Gatherers must have their bad days.’

‘This is going to be your bad day, Doctor, if you don’t start talking.’

‘I’m perfectly willing to talk. What about?’

‘The deal you and the Gatherer made. Your freedom, for turning us in!’

‘The only deal I made was with you, Mandrel. It was under duress, and you failed to keep your side of it.’

Mandrel nodded to Goudry. ‘How’s that iron?’ Goudry took out the bar, looked at it and thrust it back. ‘Another minute.’

Mandrel thrust his face close to the Doctor’s. ‘That means you’ve just one minute to change your story!’

‘Very good,’ said the Doctor approvingly. ‘The subtle approach is always more effective than mindless violence.’

‘He’s very cool, this Doctor,’ whispered Veet, almost admiringly.

‘Parts of him won’t be so cool soon,’ said Goudry, glancing at the glowing brazier. ‘Not unless he comes up with some better answers.’

Mandrel swung round on the Doctor. ‘Right Doctor, this is your last chance. Are you going to confess?’

‘Oh don’t be such a fool, Mandrel,’ said the Doctor impatiently. ‘I’ve no idea why I was freed from the Correction Centre – yet. All I know is, the Gatherer had me released, told me some unlikely story about computer error, and threw in the thousand talmars to make it more convincing.’

‘You’ll have to do better than that,’ said Mandrel. He took the metal rod from the fire. By now the heated end was glowing white hot. Mandrel waved it under the Doctor’s nose. ‘Now talk!’

The Doctor looked thoughtfully at him. ‘You’re really not very good at this sort of thing, are you Mandrel? I don’t think you’re really nasty enough at heart. I can see it in the eyes – no conviction.’

‘I’ll count to ten...’

‘Oh do put that thing down old chap, you’re only making yourself look ridiculous.’

Mandrel was uneasily aware that things weren’t going the way they were supposed to. By now the Doctor should have been begging for mercy.

‘One...’ Mandrel paused. ‘Two...’ He paused again.

‘Three,’ said the Doctor helpfully.

‘Four!’

‘Five!’

‘Five,’ repeated Mandrel, then glared at the Doctor. ‘I’m doing the counting.’

‘You can stop counting now, Mandrel,’ said another voice.

Cordo was at the top of the ladder. A somehow-different Cordo, with a blaster in his hand. There was another armed man on the ladder behind him. ‘Drop it,’ snapped Cordo, and the iron bar clattered to the floor.

‘Thank you, gentlemen,’ said the Doctor. He rose and stretched. ‘Nice to see you both again. But where’s Leela?’

Cordo and Bisham looked at each other, but neither replied.

‘Well, come on then?’ said the Doctor. ‘Where is she?’

Leela lay unconscious on an operating table, in a room very like the one in which the Doctor had awakened not so long ago. In this case the surrounding electronic apparatus was designed to help, rather than harm. A nervous medical technician was fixing a dressing to her forehead – nervous because he was being watched by the awesome figure of the Collector himself, who sat hunched in his mobile chair, the great bald head gleaming under the lights, examining Leela’s fighting knife.

‘Well?’

‘She is not seriously harmed, Excellency,’ stammered the technician. ‘The blaster bolt must have struck her a glancing blow. She will recover consciousness soon.’ He hesitated. ‘Something very strange, your Excellency, She is not numbered.’

All Company work-units were, of course, numbered at birth.

‘What?’ The Collector’s chair shot forwards and he took Leela’s dangling wrist and examined it.

‘Sometimes criminals will have the number removed by surgery,’ said the technician. ‘But there is always a scar.’

The Collector studied Leela’s unmarked wrist. ‘No number... a mystery to solve.’ He let the wrist fall.

‘Maximise her medi-care, and bring her to me for questioning the moment she is on her feet.’

The chair darted away.

The Doctor was making a speech.

After Cordo and Bisham had told their sad story, he had made a number of decisions. If Leela were still alive she would be well guarded. There was little hope of a successful rescue, even if he could persuade Mandrel to join in.

The most effective way to free Leela would be to overturn the repressive society which held her prisoner, and the Doctor had decided to do just that. If Leela was still alive, a revolution offered the best hope of rescue. If she was dead, it would be a fitting revenge.

‘I’m not asking you to help me’ said the Doctor persuasively. ‘I’m asking you to help yourselves. Nothing will change here unless you change it.’

‘We’ve got blasters now,’ said Cordo. ‘And K9’s waiting at the top of the ladder.’

‘Two blasters?’ said Veet scornfully. ‘We wouldn’t stand a chance against the guards.’

‘No, you wouldn’t,’ agreed the Doctor. ‘But what about the fifty million others in this city? How long would the guards last against

that number?'

Goudry said, 'It's madness, Doctor. You're talking about a full-scale rebellion. No one up there would support you.'

'They might – given a chance to breath clean air for a few hours, air with no conditioning drug in it. Have you thought of that?'

' *I've* thought of it' said Bisham. 'The PCM is the source of the Company's power, right enough. But there's no way of stopping it being fed into the vapour chambers, not without explosives.'

'There's always a way, Bisham,' said the Doctor urgently. 'You told me this drug is volatilised into the atmosphere. What's its critical temperature?'

'Two hundred and five Centigrade.'

'So all we have to do is reduce the temperature in the volatilising chamber, and the drug won't pass into the air!'

'There are eight chambers, Doctor, all round the city.'

Surprisingly Mandrel joined in. 'Eight chambers – all controlled from one central point.'

The Doctor looked at his unexpected ally. 'Are you sure of that, Mandrel?'

'I was a B grade in Main Control. The Doctor's right –

we could do it.'

'Do what?' asked Goudry.

It was the Doctor who answered. 'Take over Main Control.'

'Are you out of your mind?'

'There are only two work-units on duty up there,' said Mandrel. 'Two!'

Goudry stared disbelievingly at his leader. 'You're not suggesting we should join in this crazy revolution, Mandrel?'

'That's exactly what I am suggesting.'

'Why?'

Mandrel looked around the gloomy chamber. ‘What have we got to lose?’

In ringing tones the Doctor said, ‘You have nothing to lose but your chains!’

‘Well put, Doctor,’ said Bisham.

‘I have a gift for the telling phrase,’ said the Doctor modestly.

Cordo said, ‘Anything’s worth trying – anything! Just think – we could win. We could beat the Company!’

Somehow Cordo’s words seemed to turn the scale. It was as if Mandrel’s band felt that if little Cordo could find the courage to revolt, so could they all. There was a murmur of agreement.

‘All right, Doctor,’ said Goudry. ‘What’s your plan?’

8

The Prisoner

‘The first thing,’ said the Doctor briskly, ‘is to deal with their scanners.’

Mandrel looked blank. ‘What scanners?’

‘Every few metres along the subways there are tubes along the walls –’

‘You mean the sun-feeds?’

‘I mean oculoid electronic monitors, plugged into a concealed cable. Cordo, I want you to go and get two of them and bring them here. Choose a short side tunnel if you can...’ The Doctor gave detailed instructions on how to find and disconnect the tubes. ‘Take care, Cordo. Unplug them very carefully.’

Cordo hurried away, full of the importance of his mission.

The Doctor sat staring into space, turning over plans in his mind, wondering if it was all worth while. If Leela was dead, it would be an empty vengeance at best...

Yet it was worth doing, decided the Doctor. A society that had driven someone like Cordo to climb on to that parapet deserved to he overthrown. And if they’d killed Leela...

Bisham saw the look on the Doctor's face. 'I don't think she was badly wounded, Doctor. But there was nothing we could do.'

'I know, Bisham,' said the Doctor quietly. 'I know.'

Kicking and struggling wildly, a strait-jacketed Leela was dragged into the Collector's office by the Guard Commander himself. 'The terrorist, your Excellency.'

'Get this thing off me,' yelled Leela. 'Let me go!'

Busy with his calculations, the Collector didn't even look up. 'Name?'

Leela ignored him, still struggling with the jacket, and the Commander gave her a shove that sent her reeling.

'Answer his Excellency!'

He jumped back, just too late to avoid a savage kick from Leela.

'When I get out of this thing I'll split you,' she hissed.

The Collector looked up and Leela stared as if hypnotised at the tiny body and the pinched, malicious features set into the great bald head. To her fury, he was turning over her knife in his little claw-like hands.

'Name?' repeated the Collector in his thin, piping voice.

'Leela,' muttered Leela sulkily.

'Place of birth?'

'Why should I tell you –'

The Guard Commander grabbed the strait-jacket and shook Leela until her teeth rattled.

'Place of birth?' droned the Collector.

'How do I know? I am a member of the Sevateem.'

'What is the Sevateem?'

'My tribe. Tell this gorilla to keep his paws off me.'

The Collector spoke into the voice-operated computer terminal at his desk. 'Zero zero five, information report on Sevateem.'

After a moment an inhumanly calm voice chanted,

‘Zero zero five, “Sevateem”, negative report. Semantic analysis suggests linguistic corruption of “Survey Team”.

Logical inference is: degenerated, unsupported Earth colony.’

The collector’s questioning went on. ‘How did you get to Pluto?’

‘By accident – as usual!’

This earned her a thump from the Commander. ‘Answer respectfully!’

‘The Doctor brought me, in something called the TARDIS – if that leaves you any the wiser.’

‘What is the Doctor?’

‘He’s a Time Lord.’

‘You led a criminal attack on the Company Correction Centre. Why?’

‘I heard the Doctor was a prisoner there, so I came to rescue him. By the time I got there he’d already been set free by someone called the Gatherer, I think.’

‘The interview is terminated,’ said the Collector abruptly. ‘Remove her!’

The Commander grabbed Leela. ‘Do you want her erased, Excellency?’ he asked hopefully. The kick had hurt.

‘Not as of now. Place her under pending execution.’

‘Very well, Excellency.’

‘I shall issue the invoice for her erasure before close of business today.’

Leela was dragged out, still struggling furiously. The Collector considered for a moment, then turned to his computer terminal. ‘Zero zero five, Time Lords.

Specifically, a Time Lord known as the Doctor.’

Another pause, and the voice said, ‘Time Lords: oligarchic rulers of the planet Gallifrey. The planet was classified grade three in the last market survey, its potential for commercial development being

reckoned extremely low...' The voice flowed on...

The Doctor finished a series of complex adjustments to the circuitry inside one of a pair of white, plastiglass tubes –

the oculoid monitors brought to him by Cordo. He replaced the end cap on one tube and reached for the other.

'This Company of yours, what is it exactly? Can anyone tell me?'

'It's just... the Company,' said Mandrel. 'That's all anybody knows.'

'The Company gives us the suns,' said Goudry, in the tones of someone repeating a lesson. 'Without the suns, we could not live.'

'That's what they always tell us,' said Veet.

'Who runs the Company?' persisted the Doctor. 'What's it for?'

Bisham scratched his chin. 'Why it... well, it makes a profit. That's what it's for. The Gatherers run it – and the Collector. He's the highest official. There's no one else.'

'Profit has to go somewhere,' said the Doctor. 'Who gets the profit? Where does it finish up?'

Bisham gave him a puzzled look. 'I can't answer that...

they're not questions we've ever thought about.'

The Doctor snapped the end-cap on to the second tube.

'Then it's time you started. Mandrel, Bisham, Cordo, you come with me. Goudry, Veet, the rest of you, spread out across the city, contact any other bands you know. Get them to tell the people what's happening. Tell them they're not work-units, they're human beings, and humans have always had to fight for their freedom.' He stood up. 'Tell the people you tell to tell others – the word will soon spread. Now let's get started!'

Gatherer Hade swept into the Collector's office, magnificent in his gaudiest cape and turban, and bowed low. 'Your Hugeness sent for me?'

The tiny figure behind the desk raised the great bald head. 'You ordered a prisoner released from Correction earlier, Hade. Explain!'

Hade drew a deep breath. His moment of glory had arrived. Surely even the Collector would be impressed by his acumen and cunning. 'With the greatest of pleasure, your Amplification. He is an Ajack conspirator, sent here to foment rebellion. My plan is to maintain surveillance through the tracker system, identify all his contacts, and then stamp out the rebellion.'

'There is no rebellion, Hade,' said the Collector scornfully. 'Your so-called Ajack conspirator is an alien who landed on this planet by mistake. He is a Time Lord known as the Doctor.'

'But how can your Vastness be so certain?' stammered Hade.

'I simply checked Company records. Unfortunately, Hade, this Doctor who you so rashly released could still pose a problem.'

'In what way, your Voluminousness?'

'I have studied his record. He appears to have a long history of anarchic violence and the causing of economic disruption. He is not commercially orientated. He will not be sympathetic to my Company and its business methods.

He must be dealt with immediately.'

Hade was desperate to retrieve his mistake. 'If there is anything I can do... anything! Long live the glorious Company.'

'Issue hourly bulletins. Five thousand talmars' reward for information leading to the capture of the Doctor, dead or alive!'

Hade threw up his hands in awe. 'Five thousand talmars! A magnificent gesture, Excellency!'

'The money will be paid from your private purse,' said the Collector, returning to his calculations.

Hade gave a yelp of pure pain.

The Collector looked up. 'You spoke?'

'It was merely a cry of gladness at being so honoured, Excellency.'

'You will also bulletin the information that the Doctor's companion, the Savage known as Leela, is to be publicly executed for her crimes against the Company.'

‘Praise the Company for ever and ever,’ said Hade ecstatically. ‘Where is the execution to be held?’

‘In the Exchange Hall. Admission by ticket only, tickets five talmars, all proceeds to the Company Benevolent Fund.’

‘Will your enormity attend?’

‘Naturally. The execution will take place during the first work-shift. You may announce a two-hour public holiday –

without pay.’

‘The work-units will cry with delight,’. said Hade obsequiously. ‘Your Excellency’s generosity is unparalleled.’

The Collector performed another swift calculation and looked up. ‘I compute a 0.3 per cent drop in production, which is within the acceptable limit. One more thing: see that my Inner Retinue guards are stationed in all the subways around the Exchange Hall.’

‘But your Excellency, if there is no rebellion...’

‘The computer’s analysis of the Doctor’s character indicates that he is likely to attempt to prevent the execution.’ The Collector’s tiny mouth twitched on a smile.

‘With luck, we’ll be rolling both of them into the steamer.’

The Doctor finished fitting the second monitor back into place. From the end of the side-tunnel K9, Mandrel, Cordo and the others watched in puzzlement. ‘Just wait there a minute,’ called the Doctor. He walked up the tunnel, slowly and casually, hands in his pockets.

Then he walked back, the other way, equally casually.

‘Once more for luck,’ he said, and did the whole thing again.

‘Duplication quite unnecessary, Master,’ said K9.

The Doctor ignored him. ‘That should fix the image,’ he said and went to join the others.

‘What were you doing?’ asked Mandrel. ‘What did you do to those monitor things?’

‘Oh, I just fitted them with a static loop,’ said the Doctor airily,

leaving him none the wiser. ‘Now then, Mandrel, lead the way to Main Control!’

Leela was hanging from the wall in the therapy room, dangling from the straps at the back of the strait-jacket.

The Guard Commander came in to check on her, taking good care to keep out of the range of her feet.

‘Comfortable?’

‘Do I look it?’

‘I thought you might like to know that you won’t be kept pending much longer. His Excellency has just invoiced your execution.’

‘Good. At least I won’t see your ugly face again.’

The Commander leaned his broad shoulders against the doorway. ‘Be a bit of a treat for us too. We haven’t had a public steaming for quite a while.’

‘A public what?’ asked Leela uneasily.

The commander smiled. ‘Don’t worry – you’ll find out!’

Mandrel led the way through a maze of subways and minor side-tunnels into a completely different part of the great enclosed city.

Here were no clean, antiseptic corridors with their green and white colouring, their glowing light panels in the ceilings. Instead there were dank and gloomy stone-walled tunnels, dimly lit and filled with mysterious dripping and clanking noises, studded metal pipes snaking along walls and ceilings, sinisterly dark metal staircases leading up or down.

The tunnels gave on to a more open area, and soon they were surrounded by gleaming metal storage tanks, row upon row of them, surrounded by a network of catwalks and gantrys, with little substations where peak-capped technicians operated heavy controls. It was clear they had come into the more heavily industrial section of the city.

Down here the atmosphere was not so much that of a computer centre as of something more primitive – a factory, or a gasworks. On the far side of this area they came to another tunnel.

‘Check it K9,’ ordered the Doctor.

K9 glided cautiously forwards and scanned the tunnel.

It was completely deserted.

‘All clear Master!’

The Doctor, Mandrel, Bisham and Cordo moved forwards, the last two clutching blasters.

‘One more level after this,’ whispered Mandrel. ‘We’re nearly there. This leads us directly to Main Control.’

Gatherer Hade paced uneasily up and down his luxurious office. He looked up eagerly as Marn hurried in. ‘Well?’

‘We’ve picked him up on the scanner system, your honour.’ She switched on the monitor to reveal the Doctor strolling up and down a side tunnel. ‘Excellent! What’s his location?’

‘Service subway 27, District Four. Shall I order the guards to cordon off the area?’

‘Certainly not! I’ll arrest him myself.’

‘Arrest him, your honour? I thought we were going to keep him under observation until –’

‘The plan has been changed,’ said Hade hurriedly. ‘The Collector wants him taken, dead or alive.’ He took a blaster from his desk. ‘You’d better come with me, Marn, as a witness.’ He looked at the monitor. ‘The man’s an idiot, look at him wandering up and down like that. Anyone might see him!’

By now, poor Marn was totally baffled. ‘A witness to what, your honour? Why don’t you want someone else to capture him?’

‘Because that would cost me five thousand talmars, woman! Now hurry!’

Main Control had the same solid industrial air as the region surrounding it. Stone floors and iron stairways, massive functional control banks, metal pipes and hatches, and rows of illuminated instrument-displays. The duty technicians were called Synge and Hakit. Since the controls were largely automatic, there was little to do but check and re-check their functioning. The bulletins on the video

screen provided a welcome diversion.

This particular bulletin was exceptionally interesting. A picture of a wild eccentric-looking character was flashed on the screen. The usual melodious computer voice was saying, ‘Citizens, this is an important public bulletin. Have you seen this man? He is an anti-Company agent known as the Doctor, wanted for acts of terrorism. There is a reward of five thousand talmars for information leading to his capture, dead or alive.’

Synge gave a gasp of awe. To a B-grade technician, the amount was utterly staggering. ‘Five thousand talmars –

it’s colossal!’

‘It’s peanuts!’ said an indignant voice behind them. It’s an insult. The Droge of Gabrielides offered a whole star system for my head!’

The two peak-capped technicians whirled round. A strange-looking man was coming down the stairs – the man whose face was on the video screen. Behind him were two others, covering them with blasters.

Synge reached for an alarm button, but one of the men snapped, ‘Keep still–and keep your hands where we can see them.’

A tough-looking man in a ragged white shirt and leather jerkin joined the three others. ‘All right, you two, this is a rising. Either you join us, or you die!’

9

The Steaming

Shouldering the astonished technicians aside, Mandrel went over to the main temperature control bank, hands moving expertly over the levers. Dials on the temperature gauges flickered and began to fall. ‘There,’ said Mandrel happily.

Synge stared at him. ‘By the Company! You can’t do that!’

‘It’s done,’ said Bisham.

‘But the vapour towers – the PCM won’t feed into the atmosphere...’

‘We’re shutting the towers down,’ said Cordo.

‘Exactly,’ agreed the Doctor. ‘Nasty smelly things!’

Mandrel looked round his old work-place with a certain nostalgia. ‘Nerve centre of the city, this place is. All the power’s controlled from here.’

Synge was staring hard at him. ‘I remember you...

Mandrel! You attacked a Supervisor and got sent to Correction – there was a rumour you escaped.’

‘That’s right, I did. It’s Synge isn’t it? Well, B grade, what’s your answer?’

‘Answer to what?’

Cordo waved the barrel of his blaster under the noses of Synge and his companion. ‘It’s perfectly simple, Citizens.

Are you with the revolution or not?’

‘Oh, we’re with you, brother,’ said Synge hurriedly.

‘Heart and soul – aren’t we, Hakit?’

Hakit nodded dumbly.

Hade and Marn crept cautiously up to the entrance of service subway 27.

Hade braced himself.

‘Now!’ he yelled, and leaped into the subway entrance, blaster extended in both hands. ‘Freeze!’ The tunnel was empty.

‘He’s not there,’ said Hade stupidly, gazing about him.

‘I don’t understand,’ gasped Marn. ‘This is the place –

the scanners are still registering him.’

‘I don’t care what the scanners say,’ shouted Hade. He checked himself hurriedly. ‘I do care what the scanners say. Check again, Marn. There must be a malfunction!’

Marn spoke briefly into her belt-communicator and listened to the tinny-voiced reply. ‘Your Honour, I have checked with Scanner

Control. All scanner information shows the Doctor walking up and down the same place.'

'Where?'

'Here, your honour,' said Marn despairingly.

'Fool!' screamed Hade, and scurried away.

Another bleep from the video screen attracted the attention of the rebels in Main Control.

A picture of Leela appeared, and the computer voice said, 'This is the gangster terrorist Leela, shortly to be executed in the Exchange Hall. Tickets for the spectacle are still available, price five talmars, at the Gatherer's Office.'

The Doctor stared anxiously at the screen, as the calm level voice went on. 'As a special privilege, during the hours of the public holiday, the steaming will be shown live, on all bulletin screens.'

Mandrel looked up. 'The temperature in the heat exchangers is down to 70, Doctor. Shall we lock it at that level?'

'What?'

'Shall we stabilise it at 70, Doctor?'

'Yes, yes!' The Doctor looked round. 'What do they mean – steaming?'

There was a moment of painful silence, then Mandrel said gruffly, 'They'll put her into the condensation chamber, directly under here. The heat exchanger is regulated by having water pumped through it. The water turns into high-pressure steam, of course, then goes through into the condensation chamber.'

'It must be a terrible death,' said Synge ghoulishly.

'They have microphones on the casket, and in the condensor, so you can hear the screams –'

He broke off with a grunt, as Mandrel gave him an elbow-jab that nearly cracked a rib.

The Doctor was deep in thought. 'Mandrel, what would happen if we cut the water supply from the pumps?'

‘The heat exchanger would blow up – taking this control room and half the city with it!’

‘Just for a few minutes,’ said the Doctor urgently. ‘Long enough to get Leela out.’ He turned to Synge. ‘You know the layout – is it possible’?’

‘You’d have to crawl through the vent – behind that hatch in the wall there – to reach the condensation chamber,’ said Synge. ‘There’s a kind of air-lock.’ He pointed to a dial. ‘See what the atmospheric pressure in there is? Enough to flatten you.’

‘Suppose we let the pressure out?’

‘The only way to do it in time would be to open the valve from the inside.’

‘And once you’re inside, you’re dead,’ said Mandrel. ‘It’s impossible!’

A metallic voice said, ‘Suggestion, Master?’ They had carried K9 down the steps to join them.

‘What is it, K9?’

‘As my construction offers more resistance to pressure, it may be that I can function inside the vent.’

‘That’s it – no wait, a minute... How could you open the valve?’

‘I can attempt to blast it, Master.’

‘Let’s get that vent-lock open!’ said the Doctor.

The vent-lock was covered by a metal hatchway, fastened with heavy clips. They were stiff with disuse but Synge produced crowbars and Mandrel and Bisham set to work prising them off.

Cordo was staring at the video screen. It showed a confused picture of Leela being strapped into a kind of plastic container by a squad of guards. She was struggling wildly, but gradually the guards were bearing her down by sheer weight of numbers.

With a final savage heave from Mandrel, the hatch came off, revealing a dark tunnel. K9 glided towards it, and Mandrel and Bisham heaved him up and put him inside –

it was rather like putting a ferret down a rabbit hole.

The Doctor put his head inside the tunnel. ‘I don’t know how to say this K9, but...’

‘Your concern is noted, Master. Do not embarrass me with displays of emotion.’

K9 disappeared, Bisham and Mandrel started closing the hatch.

The Exchange Hall was a kind of amphitheatre, used on those comparatively rare occasions when the Company felt some kind of public assembly was needed. Usually this consisted of a meeting in which Supervisors were urged to harry their work-units to greater efforts. It was also used for the occasional public steaming. There was a raised dais at one end of the hall and a pair of sliding doors in the wall at the back of it. A set of tracks started at the front of the dais, and disappeared through the doors. The tracks were for the casket on wheels in which the guards had finally succeeded in fastening Leela, strapping down her arms and legs so that she was unable to move. As the transparent dome was lowered over her, the Collector glided up the ramp and onto the dais, with Hade, Marn and a number of Inner Retinue guards.

‘Are we ready?’ asked the Collector impatiently. He always enjoyed a good public steaming.

Hade glanced at Leela, fastened under the dome of the coffin like an orchid under glass. ‘Apparently so, your Mightiness. We shall not be long.’

The Collector looked at the body of the hall. The place was far from full, with far too many gaps in the rows of seats. ‘A poor turn-out, Hade.’

‘Five talmars is a great deal, for only one execution,’ said Hade apologetically. ‘If we could have provided a few more victims, made more of a spectacle of it.’ He sighed. ‘And, of course, they can see it for nothing on the bulletin screens anyway.’

‘Not the same thing at all,’ said the Collector peevishly.

‘It takes a live performance to give the sense of a shared experience.’ He glanced around. ‘I fear the Doctor is going to disappoint us. Your scanners haven’t detected him?’

Hade coughed. ‘Well, not exactly.’

‘What does that mean, not exactly? Either they have or they haven’t. Which?’

‘Well, the truth of the matter is, there appears to be some kind of fault in the scanner system – a false image so to speak. But I assure you, your Sublimity, it will soon be rectified...’

In Main Control the rebels were dividing their attention between the pressure gauges and the door to the vent-lock.

Suddenly there came a kind of hollow boom from behind the hatch. Immediately the pressure gauges began to fall.

‘K9’s done it,’ said the Doctor. ‘Get that hatch open.

Mandrel, reverse the pumps!’

Cordo and Bisham began knocking off the clips, more easily this second time, and Mandrel busied himself at the controls.

‘Pumps in reverse, Doctor,’ he called.

The hatch cover was lifted off, revealing K9’s tail-antenna – he’d had to reverse back to the hatch – and Bisham and Cordo lifted him down.

The Doctor patted his head. ‘Well done, K9.’

‘It was nothing, Master.’

The Doctor was already stripping off his coat and scarf, ready to go into the vent.

‘We can only give you two minutes, Doctor,’ said Mandrel. He saw a pair of clip on microphones on a shelf and tossed one to the Doctor, putting the other one on himself. ‘That’s a two-way communicator. If anything goes wrong, you can use it to let us know.’

The Doctor clipped the neck-phone onto his shirt collar. ‘All right – but remember, the condensation chamber is wired for sound. So don’t call me, I’ll call you!’

He disappeared inside the vent.

A menacing rumble began to build up. Synge was studying the dials, an expression of near-panic on his face.

‘I don’t think we’ll be able to hold it for two minutes, Mandrel. The

temperature in the heat exchanger is rising fast.'

'We must,' said Mandrel grimly. 'I told him two minutes, and two minutes he'll get.'

Bisham looked up at the screen. 'They've started. She's going into the steamer...'

Leela's casket rolled slowly along the tracks towards the double doors, which slid open as she approached...

The container passed slowly through, and the doors closed behind it. Beyond the doors was a transportation tube, and at the end of the tube was the condensation chamber.

The Collector gave a sigh of pure contentment. 'You know, Hade, it's at moments like this that I get a feeling of real job-satisfaction. Are the microphones wired in?'

Leela's slow progress down the tube could be followed on video. However, since the cameras would not function in the condensation chamber itself the spectators and viewers had to be content with the carefully transmitted sound of the victim's dying screams. Connoisseurs like the Collector considered that this restriction produced a more artistically effective result.

'There are microphones all around the condensor, most Merciful,' said Hade reassuringly. 'I am told that we can look forward to really excellent sexaphonic sound.'

The Collector glanced up at the monitor screen, which showed Leela approaching the end of her journey down the tube. 'Then we shall hear her within a few seconds.' He settled happily back in his seat.

By now the ominous rumbling of the heat exchanger was shaking Main Control.

Sweat was pouring down Synge's face. 'We can't hold it, Mandrel!'

Mandrel's face was set. 'Another twenty seconds.'

'We can't. It's going, listen!' Synge leaped for the controls, but Cordo and Bisham caught his arms.

'The Doctor must be in the condensation block by now,'

said Bisham.

Cordo said, ‘If we release that heat he’ll be vapourised.’

‘If you don’t we’ll all die,’ screamed Synge. ‘Look at those dials!’

Remorselessly Mandrel said, ‘Ten more seconds...’

Doors slid open at the end of the transportation tube, and Leela entered the darkness of the condensation chamber.

Her jaws were clamped tightly together. Jeering guards had told her of the microphones, and she was determined to fight to the last, denying her enemies their pleasure. She would die without making a sound.

10

Revolt

There was complete silence in the Exchange Hall now and no one was listening more attentively than the Collector himself. All that came through the speakers was the shudder of vibrating metal.

‘That noise, Hade,’ said the Collector pettishly. ‘Can’t something be done about it? We shan’t hear her properly.’

‘It is vibration in the exchange, your Magnificence.’

‘I know what it is, Hade. I just don’t want it to ruin my pleasure.’

Marn did her best to placate him. ‘Her cries will be clearly audible, your Honour.’

‘But the subtleties will be lost! The deeper notes of despair, the final dying cadences. The whole point of a good steaming, Marn, is the range it affords.’

Hade got to his feet. ‘I’ll see if the sound discriminator can be more finely tuned, your Immensity.’

Leela lay motionless and silent, waiting for death.

Although it was very hot in the condensation chamber, there had not been the blast of searing heat she had expected. Perhaps they would allow the heat to build up slowly, to break her will. Well, they would not succeed.

To her astonishment Leela suddenly became aware of a dark shape

looming over her. The transparent dome was lifted with an echoing rumble and she sensed rather than saw that it was the Doctor.

She opened her mouth, and the Doctor promptly clamped a hand over it. He kept it there a moment, then satisfied that Leela had understood the need for silence, he began working at the straps that held her down. The buckle on the last one jammed, and the Doctor snapped it, with a last desperate heave.

A ghostly voice echoed around the chamber. 'Doctor!'

The roaring sound was very loud now in Main Control, and no one there doubted that the exchanger would blow up in a matter of seconds.

Mandrel was speaking into the communicator, his face twisted with fear. 'Doctor, can you hear me? We can't give you any more time. The heat exchanger will blow any second. Get out, Doctor. Get out now!' Unfortunately Mandrel's well-intentioned message was broadcast not only to the Doctor but to the entire audience in the Exchange Hall – including the enraged and astonished Collector.

Mandrel's hoarse voice came faintly but over the speakers. 'Get out, Doctor. Get out now!'

In the condensation chamber the Doctor ripped the mike from his throat and stamped on it, though he was aware that the damage was done.

He reached out and helped Leela to scramble from the container and wriggled away, through the other side of the condensation chamber, and down the vent that led to Main Control.

'What *was* that?' screamed the Collector. 'What is going on in there?'

'I thought I heard someone say, "Doctor", your Sagacity,' whispered Hade. 'It wasn't the girl, there hasn't been a sound out of her.'

'Precisely so, Hade. Something has gone wrong in Main Control. Order the guards to investigate.'

'Immediately, your Omniscience,' quavered Hade.

'Marn, what are you waiting for?'

Beckoning guards to accompany her, Marn hurried from the Exchange

Hall.

The rumble rose to a roar, and Mandrel dared wait no longer. ‘Synge, open the flow valves,’ he bellowed. ‘I’ll see to the pump.’

There was a flurry of activity.

‘Flow valves open,’ reported Synge.

‘Main pump in,’ said Mandrel.

Synge checked the gauges. ‘Pressure 60, atmosphere...

still rising.’

‘Cut in the auxiliary pumps,’ shouted Mandrel.

‘Quickly, now!’

‘Auxiliaries in!’

They waited tensely.

The threatening rumble rose to a peak – and then began dying away. ‘She’s cooling,’ yelled Mandrel. ‘We’ve made it!’

Cordo mopped his forehead. ‘Do you think the Doctor got out of the condensor in time?’

Bisham shrugged. ‘Well, if he didn’t, he won’t have known much about it.’

Mandrel rubbed a hand over his eyes. ‘Well, we did our best. We gave him his two minutes and more.’

A muffled thumping came from inside the vent.

‘They’re here,’ yelled Cordo. ‘He made it!’

Cordo and Bisham rushed to the hatch and wrenched it off. First the Doctor then Leela scrambled out into Main Control, both grimy and sweating. Ignoring the general hubbub of congratulations, the Doctor got back into his coat and scarf. ‘Who was making all that noise?’ he demanded.

Mandrel looked shamefaced. ‘I was, Doctor.’

‘I told you not to use that radio-link.’

‘We had to tell you time was up,’ protested Bisham.

‘Unfortunately, you told the Collector, too. That fish-blooded little sadist had Leela’s execution wired for sound, remember?’

Leela was glaring suspiciously at Mandrel. ‘What is happening? Why is the ugly one here?’

The Doctor grinned. ‘It’s all right, Leela, he’s on our side now.’

‘We’ve started a revolution,’ said Cordo proudly. ‘Down with the Company!’ He looked a little shocked at his own daring.

‘There’s still a lot to do yet,’ warned the Doctor. Bisham bustled up to them. ‘I’ve been checking the atmospheric readings, Doctor. Things are going well. The PCM is clearing faster than I expected.’

‘Now maybe we’ll be able to put some fight into the work-units,’ said Mandrel broodingly. ‘If just one district joins the resistance, word will soon spread through the whole city.’

The Doctor was looking thoughtfully at the video screen. ‘Maybe we can do a bit of word-spreading ourselves. Where’s that public video controlled from?’

‘The Collector’s Palace,’ said Mandrel. ‘He runs everything from the main computer in his office. Why?’

‘Suppose the public video announced there’d been a successful revolution,’ said the Doctor slowly.

‘Everyone would believe it!’ said Cordo. ‘They always believe everything on the bulletins.

‘Exactly!’ said the Doctor. ‘And if everyone believed it was true, then it would be true.’

‘The Palace is guarded by the Inner Retinue,’ warned Bisham.

‘The Collector is guarded by the Inner Retinue,’

corrected the Doctor. ‘Most of them are probably with him right now, guarding the Exchange Hall. Come on Leela.’

They went up the stairs, looked out in the corridor –

and then dashed back down again. ‘Guards,’ said Leela.

‘Coming this way. There is a woman with them.’

‘Everyone stay calm,’ ordered the Doctor. He pointed to Synge and Hakit. ‘You two – at the power bank as usual.

Act normally. The rest of you, get down.’ They ducked out of sight behind one of the power banks.

The door opened, Marn’s two guards appeared at the top of the steps, and saw Synge and Hakit going peacefully about their usual routine.

Synge looked up. ‘What’s happening? What are you two doing here?’

The guards clattered down the steps, looking round them suspiciously.

Cordo rose from hiding behind them. ‘All right – drop your blasters.’

Minutes later the guards were overpowered. Mandrel and Bisham found a roll of electrical flex and began tying them up.

Marn peered through the doorway, saw what was happening, and ran for her life.

‘They’re bound to be more of them,’ warned the Doctor.

‘You may be under siege here pretty soon. You’ll just have to hold out as long as possible.’

‘We’ll do it, Doctor,’ said Cordo confidently. ‘Good! K9, where are you?’

‘Here, Master!’

‘K9, I want you to stay here and help my friends, understand?’

K9 extruded his blaster. ‘I am full offensive capability, Master.’

‘Good boy! Come on, Leela!’

They hurried away.

Gloomily, the Collector watched the work-units filing out of the Exchange Hall. ‘An unsuccessful operation, Hade, yielding neither profit nor pleasure.’

Hade was wringing his hands. ‘I simply can’t understand it, your Supernal Eminence. No one has ever endured a steaming without vocalising in the most gratifying fashion.’

‘It’s all been a complete waste of time,’ grumbledthe Collector. ‘And we’ve lost 0.04 per cent in production.’ He wheeled round on Hade. ‘Unpaid overtime to be introduced immediately for all work-grades until the deficit is made up. See to it, Hade.’

Hade grovelled. ‘Without fail, oh Monstrosity, without fail.’

The Guard Commander approached and saluted. ‘Well, what is it?’ snarled the Collector.

‘Some minor disturbance, your Excellency. It might be wiser not to travel on the subways until the trouble has been suppressed.’

‘What trouble?’

The Commander swallowed hard. ‘I understand that some of the work-units are refusing to leave their dormers, your Excellency.’

Hade gasped. ‘Refusing to leave – I’ve never heard of such a thing.’

‘The situation must be normalised,’ screeched the Collector. ‘Any sustained unrest amongst the work-force will adversely affect Company profitability.’

‘Sing adoration to our Company,’ quavered Hade, but no one took any notice.

‘I have despatched some of the Inner Retinue, Excellency,’ said the Commander reassuringly. ‘The account will be swiftly settled.’

‘With interest, I trust, Commander,’ snapped the Collector. ‘They must be made to pay.’

‘I will introduce a swingeing output-linked penalty tax in my next monthly budget, your Corpulence,’ promised Hade.

‘The Doctor is behind all this,’ muttered the Collector.

‘I sense the vicious doctrine of egalitarianism.’

‘Everyone knows your senses are infallible, your Prominence.’

‘Have the guards you sent to Main Control reported back yet?’

‘No, your Omnipresence. I sent my underling Marn with them. She will report back soon.’

‘Not good enough, Hade, not good enough. I am noting your work rate, your efficiency index.’

‘I will expediate action myself, your Aggrandisement. I go immediately... immediately!’

Hade ran from the Hall, and hurried down the corridor towards Main Control. He was almost flattened by Marn, who was running the other way. ‘Back, your honour. Get back!’ She pulled him back round the corner, just as an electron bolt sizzled past their heads.

Hade stared in disbelief at the scorch-mark on the wall.

‘Mare,’ he said severely, ‘someone is shooting at us.

Explain!’

‘It’s the rebels, your honour,’ gasped Marn. ‘They’ve got blasters... they’ve taken over Main Control. The two guards who were with me were captured. Then I ran into more rebels in the tunnels and corridors – I barely managed to escape myself.’

Hade was outraged. ‘Rebellion? That’s impossible, it’s against all their conditioning.’

‘The air-conditioning isn’t working at an effective level, your honour. They’ve sabotaged it!’

‘This is terrible,’ gasped Hade. ‘Unbelievable. We must notify the Collector immediately.’

‘I have already sent more guards to re-capture Main Control,’ said Marn. ‘According to the latest reports, the rebels are driving them off...’

Cordo emptied his blaster at a fleeing guard, passed it to Bisham, who handed him a freshly charged one. ‘You’ll never believe this, Bisham, but I think I’m beginning to enjoy myself.’

Bisham smiled. ‘The air’s better without PCM, isn’t it?’

‘And we’ll never pay breathing tax to the Collector again.’

‘We’ll pay no taxes at all, if I have my way,’ said Mandrel. ‘The

Collector has grabbed his last talmar from me!'

Cordo stretched. 'I feel like a new man.'

Mandrel clapped him on the shoulder. 'You'll be a dead new man if you don't keep your eyes on that corridor.'

'I know, Mandrel, I know. K9's covering me from further down.' But Cordo turned his attention back to the corridor all the same.

Bisham went back inside Main Control, and handed the blaster to Synge, who began charging it with a new power pack.

'I wonder what's happening in the subways and dormers?' said Synge nervously.

Bisham shrugged. 'Theoretically the dispersion rate will be a little slower down there. Still, there should be some effects showing by now.'

Mandrel said, 'If the work-units in the dormers turn, the guards will have their hands full...'

The dormers were simply subway tunnels, sealed off with doors at each end and crammed tightly with bunks. Men were sitting and lying on the bunks, chatting casually, ignoring the siren signal.

A Company guard strode down the middle aisle. 'Come on, move yourselves. Report for work at once.'

There was a rumble of anger, and a good deal of shouted advice.

'Get lost!'

'Drop dead!'

'Clear off out of it.'

'Work, work, work!' screamed the guard. 'Gatherer's orders.'

A voice shouted, 'We're all on strike. Join us or get out.'

The guard swung round 'Who said that?'

A scruffy, nondescript-looking man shouldered his way through the crowd. He wasn't even in Company uniform. 'I did! Nobody works today!'

The guard drew his blaster. ‘That’s mutiny against the Company. You’ve just earned yourself an early death day, Citizen!’

Before he could fire, Goudry kicked the blaster from his hand, and the guard went down under the tide of angry men. The revolution was under way.

11

The Confrontation

An astonished guard shot through the doorway of the Collector’s office, propelled by Leela’s foot. He bounced off the enormous desk and fell half-stunned to the ground.

Leela bounded through the doorway after him, glancing swiftly round the rows of whirring and clicking computers and calculators that filled the room. ‘It’s all right, Doctor,’

she called. ‘It’s quite safe.’ With a cry of delight, she saw her knife in the centre of the Collector’s great desk, and snatched it up.

The unfortunate guard was just struggling to his feet when he found himself flat on his hack again. Leela was pinning him down, her knife at his throat.

The Doctor ambled through the doorway and clicked his tongue disapprovingly. ‘There’s no need to kill him, Leela. He hasn’t done you any harm.’

‘I know that, Doctor,’ said Leela patiently. ‘So I’m going to kill him before he does.’

‘No!’ said the Doctor sharply.

Leela scowled up at him, her knife still at the terrified guard’s throat. The Doctor could be very unreasonable at times. ‘Listen, Doctor, the last guard I spared recovered and warned his comrades. That’s why I got captured – and nearly steamed, in case you’ve forgotten.’ She raised the knife.

‘We’ll make sure this one doesn’t get away and warn anyone,’ promised the Doctor hastily. ‘Bring him over here.’

Sulkily Leela lugged the guard to his feet and dragged him over to the Doctor, who stared into the man’s eyes, which were already open wide

with fear.

‘Look into my eyes,’ commanded the Doctor. ‘Look at me... it is your sleep-time. You are in a deep, deep sleep.

You will sleep, standing up in that corner, until I tell you to wake.’

The Doctor pushed the guard into a corner, where he stood obediently, asleep at attention.

He turned to find Leela swaying on her feet, eyes closed.

He led her away from the sleeping guard and whispered,

‘Hey, wake up. Wake up!’

Leela opened her eyes and blinked at him. She looked at the still-sleeping guard. ‘How did you do that?’

‘Just a knack,’ said the Doctor modestly. ‘You have it or you don’t.’

Leela looked around her. ‘This is where the small one sat upon his throne. They brought me here to see him.’

‘That’s right. The spider in the centre of his web!’

The Doctor went behind the desk, and stood where the Collector’s mobile throne usually stood. ‘I see... he has a computer analysing and feeding him the returns from each Megropolis... And when he wants to broadcast some cheering hit of news – like the imposition of a double-vision tax on everybody with two eyes – he must talk to the computer...’ The Doctor pointed to one of the many consoles on the desk. ‘Here!’ he said triumphantly.

Leela shook her head. ‘No he didn’t.’

‘What?’

‘When I was brought before him, and he spoke to the computer he did it there!’ She pointed to the other side of the desk.

‘Ah!’ said the Doctor thoughtfully. ‘Oh well, never mind, I daresay I’ll soon get the hang of it!’

In the Exchange Hall, things were looking very bad.

More and more horrifying reports were coming in: work-units refusing

to leave their dormers; work-units downing tools before the end of shift; a considerable number of guards had failed to return from their patrols; armouries had been broken open and ransacked, consumbanks smashed and looted – the list seemed endless.

Hade recounted some of the latest disasters to the Collector and concluded dolefully, 'I fear the situation is worsening hourly, your Grossness.'

In ancient times, the bearer of bad news was slain, and Hade – unfortunately for him – was in a very similar position. The Collector needed a scapegoat, and Hade was the nearest.

'Laxity, Hade,' hissed the Collector, quivering with rage on his mobile throne. 'Laxity and weakness. You have shown the work-units too much kindness. It is a grave error of judgment. How often have I told you that grinding oppression of the masses is the only policy that produces reasonable dividends?'

Hade was past trying to defend himself. 'The fact is, your Orotundity,' he said wearily, 'my Megro-guards are outnumbered by this rabble. If yuu could lend me the help of your Inner Retinue. They wait here even now, unused.'

The Collector's head was shaking rapidly from side to side. 'No, no, no, Hade. The sole task of the Inner Retinue is to protect my person.' He spun his chair. 'You have mishandled this whole situation, Hade, mishandled it very badly. And as for your ambition to become Taxmaster General – after this, you can forget it.'

The chair shot over to the doorway, where the Commander waited, leaving Hade staring dolefully after it.

Surely there must be some way to redeem himself.

Marn hurried up to him, white and shaken. 'Your honour?'

'What now Marn?'

'I have just been informed that some work-units have gone up to the roof of block 40 – to look at our sun.'

Hade was outraged. 'Outrageous! Sacrilege. Work-units are absolutely forbidden to see the light of the sun. It's much too good for them. I'll soon put a stop to this!' He hurried away.

On the far side of the room, the Collector was giving his orders to the Guard Commander. ‘The combat situation is escalating. That fool Hade has let everything get out of hand. It is essential that I return to the Palace to take charge from there. I must implement my contingency plans.’

The Commander protested. ‘But Excellency, there is fighting in all the corridors and subways. Armed rebels are everywhere. We shall never regain the Palace alive.’

‘I shall reach the Palace alive,’ said the Collector waspishly. ‘The Inner Retinue will march around me in close order. Your bodies will shield me. Now hurry!’

The Doctor finished punching a long and complicated series of instructions into the computer, and sat back beaming. ‘That should do it!’

Leela had been prowling around. Suddenly she called,

‘Doctor, come and see!’

The Doctor went over to her.

In a gloomy corner there stood a tall metal object, a kind of cabinet with a metal dial in the centre of the massive door. ‘Is it a TARDIS?’ asked Leela.

The Doctor grinned. ‘Not quite. It’s an old-fashioned bank manager’s safe – brought here from Old Earth, I imagine, to serve as the Company vault.’

Rubbing his fingers on his lapels in the traditional safe-cracker’s gesture, the Doctor put his ear to the door and began twirling the dial.

Leela watched impatiently for a while and then said,

‘Doctor –’

‘Ssh!’ said the Doctor fiercely.

She leaned forward and listened. ‘Is there some creature beyond the door?’

‘What?’

Leela too put her ear to the door. ‘I hear nothing, Doctor,’ she

whispered.

‘Neither do I!’ the Doctor whispered back. Impatiently, Leela straightened up. ‘Then why are we whispering?’

‘Tradition! I always whisper when I’m opening safes.’

The Doctor made a few more turns, and tried the door handles. The door refused to budge.

Leela looked curiously at him. ‘What are you doing?’

‘I don’t know! It always looks so easy when other people do it.’ He fished out his sonic screwdriver, adjusted it, and gave the old-fashioned safe-lock a couple of quick blasts.

He tried the door again and it started to swing open.

‘That’s more like it!’

As the door swung wide, Leela leapt back, drawing her knife. The inside of the safe was lined with row upon row of metal trays. ‘Microfiles,’ said the Doctor. ‘Company records.’ He turned away.

Leela was disappointed. ‘Is that all? Why was it locked?’

Before the Doctor could stop her, she stepped inside the safe.

The Doctor whirled round. ‘Look out Leela, it may be –

’

There was a crackle of electricity and a blinding flash and Leela was flung out of the safe and several feet across the room. She fell unconscious to the floor.

‘– booby-trapped,’ concluded the Doctor sadly. He hurried over and checked Leela’s pulse. ‘She’ll live, just a bit of a shock. Why don’t these girls ever listen to me?’

Things had been quiet in Main Control for sometime now

– the fighting seemed to have moved to other parts of the city, and the guards were too busy or too discouraged to mount another attack.

Bisham checked the atmospheric indicator. ‘The PCM

in the atmosphere has fallen to less than three parts a thousand now.'

A beep from the video screen attracted their attention, and they all crowded round it.

The Sunmakers symbol appeared, and the computer said, 'Attention all Citizens. Stand by for an important announcement.' There was a pause and then the voice went on, calm and melodious as ever. 'Megropolis One is now under the management of the Citizens' Revolution. The Collector, the Tax Gatherer and all Company guards and officials are to be arrested on sight.'

'It's happened,' said Mandrel unbelievingly. 'It's really happened!'

Placidly the computer voice continued. 'The rule of the Company is now ended. All work-places will remain closed until further notice. Long live the revolution.'

The screen went blank.

Cordo gave a yell of delight, and fired his blaster in the air. 'It's over. We've won.'

'Hang on a minute,' said Bisham cautiously. 'I almost believed it myself for a moment, but that bulletin is fixed.

It's just the Doctor, trying to push things along.'

'Don't you remember what he told us?' said Mandrel. 'If it's on public video everyone will believe it must be true.

And if everyone thinks it true, then it will become true!'

'We believed it, didn't we?' said Cordo. 'We believed it even though we knew it was fixed. How do you think it'll affect the other work-units?'

'It'll bring the whole city to our side,' said Mandrel. 'All those who were hesitating...'

'Then what are we doing here?' asked Cordo. 'We've got blasters, we should get out there and help them!'

Mandrel looked at Cordo and smiled wryly to himself, thinking of the terrified little D grade who had been thrust into his hide-out. Who would believe this militant revolutionary was the same man? Still, a lot of things had changed on Megropolis One since the arrival of the

Doctor.

Mandrel looked at Bisham. ‘What do you think?’

‘I think Cordo’s right. The fight’s moved on from here now.’

Mandrel turned to the two technicians. ‘You two can run things here?’

Synge nodded. ‘I suppose so. But leave K9 on guard in the corridor – just in case someone tries to feed the PCM

back in the air.’

‘We’ll do that.’

Mandrel led the others away, and Synge turned to Hakit. ‘Revolution on Megropolis One! The end of Company rule. Never thought I’d see the day.’

Hakit just nodded. He had always been a work-unit of few words.

Marn sat disconsolately in the empty Exchange Hall, wondering what to do next. She had listened to the revolutionary bulletin in stunned amazement and, just as the Doctor had predicted, decided that since it was on public video it must be true.

She wandered out into the corridor, turned a corner, and ran straight into a band of very excited revolutionaries.

At the sight of her Company coverall a yell went up.

‘There’s one! A Company official. Get her!’

Marn drew her blaster and levelled it, but the little band of revolutionaries marched cheerfully on. Suddenly Marn realised it was hopeless. She could kill one, perhaps many of them, but the rest would pull her down. And even if she escaped this time, there would be other bands... Just like the mighty Company itself, she was helpless in the face of such unity. Reversing her blaster, she held it out and offered it to the sturdy work-unit leading the band.

‘Citizens, I elect to join the revolution!’

There was a moment of confused silence, then the man took the blaster and thrust it in his belt, slapped Marn on the back, and ran on.

Marn was borne ahead by the group of cheering, shouting

revolutionaries. Soon she was cheering and shouting herself. ‘Down with the Company!’ It was, she decided, rather enjoyable.

A little crowd of Citizens was milling rather aimlessly about on the roof of block 40.

Mainly at the urging of the woman called Veet, they had committed their great act of defiance, and come out into the forbidden light of the sun. No one had even tried to stop them, and by now the whole thing was a bit of an anti-climax. Some formed into earnestly chattering groups, discussing their next move. Some were content simply to stand there, turning their faces to the sunshine, like plants.

Others peered over the parapet, marvelling at the size of the city all around them, gazing down in horrified amazement into the dizzying depths below. Veet, who had led them up there, was wondering what to do next.

Then Gatherer Hade appeared on the roof. He marched up to the little group, huffing with indignation. ‘You there!

What are you doing up here? This is an abominable crime against the Company. An outrage... Leave here at once do you hear me?’

All in all, it was not a wise move. The work-units had had enough of Hade and his kind. The very sight of him was an offence to them. He was sleek and plump, where they were lean and worn. His clothes were rich and brightly coloured, where theirs were drab and serviceable.

He was rich and arrogant, while they were poor and humble, ground down for generations by Hade and others like him. A murmur of anger rumbled through the crowd.

‘Look,’ called Veet mockingly. ‘It’s the Gatherer.

Welcome, your honour.’

‘I order you to leave,’ screamed Hade. ‘You’ll pay for this, all of you! You’ll pay dearly.’

To his unbelieving horror he heard someone shout,

‘Shut up, old rubber guts.’

Someone else called, ‘String the old swine up.’

Suddenly Hade was the focus of an angry mob.

Another voice shouted, ‘Chuck him over the edge!’

There was a roar of approval. ‘Let’s see if old rubber-guts will bounce!’

Dozens of hands grasped hold of Hade and lifted him aloft.

‘Let me go,’ he screamed. ‘Don’t you dare! I’m an official of the Company!’

It was probably the worst thing he could have said.

They carried him to the parapet and heaved him over.

They watched the rotund body go down and down and down, twisting and turning in the wind like some brightly coloured insect.

‘We’ll do the same to the Collector when we find him, eh Citizens?’ shouted Veet.

Most of them turned away in disgust.

The crowd shuffled off the roof, a bit shamefaced. There was a general feeling things had got out of hand, gone a bit too far. But there wasn’t very much that they could do about it now. From the top of a thousand-metre building, it’s a very long way down.

12

Liquidation

The Doctor was right inside the safe studying microrecords through a reader, when the Collector sped into the room on his mobile throne. As he had predicted, he had reached the office alive, though it had cost the lives of most of the Inner Retinue. The few still alive were waiting for orders outside.

Leela lay stretched out on the floor, still unconscious.

The Collector braked in astonishment, at the sight of the guard standing to attention with eyes closed. He spun the chair and darted to his usual position behind the desk.

He snatched up a roll of print-out and began studying the figures, just as if it was a normal working day. He happened to raise his eyes from the print-out and was astonished to see the safe door wide open. He

was even more astonished when the Doctor stepped out of the safe.

'Just checking the books,' said the Doctor cheerfully.

'Make less noise,' said the Collector sharply, and returned to his work. But his hand was edging nearer to an alarm button on his desk. He looked up triumphantly at the Doctor. 'Your appearance here is not unexpected.' Like a scuttling crab, his hand slid nearer to the button.

'I'm not the auditor, you know,' said the Doctor mildly.

'Only the Doctor.'

'I am aware of your identity. Have you come to kill me?

As you see I am not armed.'

'No, I am not going to kill you. Just close you down.'

'An idle boast, Doctor. Other competitors have tried.

You should read our brochure.'

'Oh, but I have! Let me see now. "The Company is solidly established with a widely diversified operational structure".'

The Collector's hand made a final spring, and his thumb jabbed triumphantly at the button. 'You are a fool, Doctor. I shall take great pleasure in having you steamed for your interference.'

The Doctor grinned. He lifted the button from the desk, held it high to show the trailing wires, and tossed it aside.

'I disconnected your intercom, Collector. I didn't want our conference interrupted.'

'I see I have underestimated you, Doctor. Very well, what are your terms?'

Almost idly the Doctor said, 'In a moment. Tell me about the Company.'

The Collector's eyes gleamed. 'Ah, I see you are interested, Doctor. You'll find us an excellent outfit to work for. Progress from middle to senior management can be exceptionally rapid for the talented executive.'

‘Never mind that. Where’s Head Office. What planet?’

After a moment the Collector said, ‘Usurius.’

‘Of course. I might have guessed as much from your squiddy little eyes.’

‘You are acquainted with our species?’

‘Not personally – before now. The Usurians are listed in Professor Thripsted’s *Flora and Fauna of the Universe* as poisonous fungi, I believe.’

The Collector returned to his print-outs. ‘I don’t entirely like your attitude, Doctor. If you want to get on in the Company –’

The Doctor snatched the print-out the Collector was reading, tore it into shreds and tossed the fragments into the air.

‘Are you mad?’

‘Quite mad. Mad as a hatter. How did you get control over humanity?’

‘It was a normal business operation. The Company was looking for property in this section of the galaxy. Earth was in a run-down condition, polluted, its people dying... We made a deal.’

‘Go on.’

‘We moved the population of Earth to Mars, after our engineering division had made that planet habitable for their species.’

‘Then taxed the life out of them, to recover your capital investment?’

‘Quite so. When the resources of Mars were exhausted, we created a new environment for them, here on Pluto.’

‘What about the intervening planets?’

‘They were not considered economically viable for exploitation.’

‘So when you’d carted the people of Earth out here you really turned on the screws. The running costs must be enormously high.’

‘That is so, Doctor. Six suns to be fuelled and serviced.’

‘Six suns! And I suppose when this planet is used up, you’ll move your

slave labour force somewhere else?'

'Alas no! There is nowhere else within reach that is economic. This branch will be closed down.'

'Leaving the humans to die?'

'Yes, when the suns run down – it will only be a matter of a few years before the fuel resources are exhausted.' The Collector sighed. 'It has not been an entirely successful operation. Humans do not really make a good work-force.

Many of our other operations produce a much higher return with less expenditure on labour.'

'You bloodsucking Usurian leeches won't be content till you own the entire galaxy, will you? Commercial imperialism is just as bad as military conquest.'

The Collector shrugged his tiny shoulders. 'We have tried war on occasion – but the use of purely economic power is far more effective.'

The Doctor stared down at the little creature from his great height. 'You infinite nothing,' he said scornfully.

There was the distant rumble of an explosion. 'Don't you hear that? The revolution is coming closer. What's the Company's policy about that?'

'The revolution will be quelled. Business will continue as usual.'

'Oh wake up, can't you? Wake up and look at the facts!

Wake up!'

The sleeping guard in the corner came to life, looking round in puzzlement.

'I know the facts, Doctor.'

'Then face them. You and a handful of bureaucrats won't be able to put these people back in chains now!'

'Then they will all die,' said the Collector calmly.

Suddenly the Doctor felt the muzzle of the guard's blaster in his back. He glanced over his shoulder. 'Oh, it's you again, is it? Oh, dear, I said

“wake up”, didn’t I?’

The Collector wheeled his chair and opened a hidden drawer in his desk. ‘I fear our conference has gone on too long, Doctor. It is time to put Contingency Plan A into effect. The switch in this drawer controls sprinkler valves throughout the city.’

‘Rain stopped play?’ said the Doctor lightly, though his eyes were wary. ‘It will take more than a little water to dampen this rebellion.’

The Collector cackled, enjoying his moment of triumph.

‘The sprinklers will release Dianane into the atmosphere –

a deadly poison. Within ten seconds, everyone in this city will be dead.’

‘Except you?’

‘Except me,’ agreed the Collector. ‘I do not breathe air.’

‘But this chap with his gun in my back does.’

The Collector glared at the guard. ‘Kill the Doctor.’

The guard hesitated.

‘Kill him,’ shrieked the Collector.

A knife whistled through the air and thudded into the guard’s back. Leela had recovered – just in time.

‘Nice throw,’ said the Doctor appreciatively.

The Collector reached for the switch, but the Doctor’s long arm shot out and slammed the drawer shut, nipping the Collector’s fingers. He yelled, ‘Ow!’ like a hurt child, and sucked them indignantly.

‘What do we do now, Doctor?’ asked Leela.

The Doctor smiled. ‘You’ll like this bit! Just watch!’

Almost unbelievably, the Controller had returned to his study of the computer data. ‘Nobody understands,’ he muttered. ‘Business is business.’ He snatched up the latest print-out, studied it with mounting horror, then leaned over his voice-operated computer terminal. ‘Nine zero nine. Mistake in Megropolis Six analysis. Re-

check.'

The calm computer voice came back. 'Nine zero nine.

Re-check Megropolis Six. Analysis confirmed correct.'

'Ha!' said the Doctor delightedly. 'Watch this, Leela!'

The Collector was frantically studying the latest readout strips. 'I don't understand,' he said to himself. The door slid open and the Guard Commander appeared, a drawn blaster in his hand. The Collector barely spared him a glance. 'Arrest these idiots, Commander. I have a serious problem to attend to... Nine zero nine. Re-check the Megropolis Four analysis.'

'Nine zero nine,' said the computer imperturbably.

'Megropolis Four analysis confirmed correct.'

Mandrel and Cordo came into the room, and lined up beside the Commander. They too carried blasters – and suddenly the Doctor realised that all three weapons were pointing at the Collector. The Inner Retinue – what little was left of it – had joined the rebellion.

Cordo raised his voice, 'Collector! In the name of the work-units...'

'Not work-units, Cordo,' called Leela. ' *People*.'

Cordo nodded. 'Yes... in the name of the *people*, Collector, I order you to surrender for trial by a properly appointed court.'

The Collector ignored him, shuffling wildly through the read-out strips. 'It isn't possible. Negative surplus!

Inflationary spiral uncheckable! Negative growth! This branch is no longer viable. We are bankrupt... business failure. Cut losses! Closure imperative! Immediate liquidation! Liquidate! Liquidate! Liquidate! And before their astonished eyes the Collector did just that, simultaneously shrinking in size, and dissolving into a blob of green slime which vanished below the level of the desk.

They ran to the chair, and were just in time to see the last of the Collector in the form of a globby green liquid, swirling round a circular basin set into the seat of the mobile throne and disappearing down a kind of plug-hole.

Bisham came running into the room just in time to see the astonished

group standing around an apparently empty chair. ‘Sorry I’m late. What happened to the Collector?’

‘Don’t ask me,’ said Mandrel. ‘Doctor?’

‘He’s reverted to his natural form,’ said the Doctor. He tipped the chair to show a kind of tank set between the wheels. ‘He was only held in that shape by stratified particle radiation. That’s why he could never leave this machine!’

Leela knelt to peer at the tank, which seemed to be about three-quarters full of murky green liquid. ‘Do you mean he’s in there now?’

‘That’s right.’

‘We could make a hole in it?’ suggested Leela.

‘Do you think he’ll ever get out again,’ asked Cordo fearfully.

The Doctor fished in his pockets and produced a champagne cork. ‘Not if we bung in a plug.’ Suiting the action to the word, he jammed the cork in the hole. ‘There.

That’s bottled him up.’

The Commander said gruffly, ‘I don’t understand. Why did he have to make himself look human?’

‘You’d understand if you’d ever seen an Usurian,’ the Doctor assured him. ‘I mean, who’d take orders from a something that looks like a lump of seaweed with eyes?’

‘Let K9 back into the TARDIS, Leela,’ said the Doctor. He handed her the key. Leela opened the door, and K9 shot gratefully inside. They were on the sunlit roof again, where the TARDIS had first landed. Everything seemed just the same, but the faint cloying perfume was no longer in the air.

‘I wish you could stay longer, Doctor,’ said Cordo wistfully.

‘I’ll try to visit you when you’re settled back on Earth.

But there’s a lot to do before then – taking over the other Megropolises, getting this one going again.’

‘Sounds like a lot of hard work,’ said Bisham ruefully.

‘It will be – but this time you’ll be free. You’ll be working for yourselves.’

‘You really believe we can colonise the Earth again, Doctor?’

‘You must,’ said the Doctor. ‘Earth will have regenerated in the millions of years since you humans left it. Go back to a place under your own sun.’

‘We can really do it, Doctor?’ asked Mandrel. ‘Take over the sky freighters, make the journey back to Earth?’

‘Of course you can,’ said the Doctor heartily. ‘Easily.

Three hundred million of you can’t go wrong!’ (which is more than you can say for the TARDIS, he thought to himself). With a wave of his hand, the Doctor disappeared inside the TARDIS, closing the door behind him. A few minutes later, with a wheezing, groaning sound, the blue box faded away.

Cordo, Mandrel and Bisham blinked, looked wonderingly at each other, and headed for the lift that would take them back to the city.

As the Doctor had said, there was a lot to do.

In the TARDIS control room Leela, under K9’s directions, was busily setting out the interrupted chess game.

‘King to Bishop 4, Mistress’, instructed K9.

The Doctor looked at the board. ‘Now then, where were we?’

‘We were at mate in six moves, Master,’ said K9 eagerly.

‘You be quiet,’ said the Doctor and busied himself at the controls.

‘I wonder why the Collector gave up so easily,’ said Leela. ‘I thought he would fight.’

‘He got a bit of a shock,’ explained the Doctor. ‘You see I fed a 2 per cent growth tax into the computer, index linked. It blew the economy apart, and he just couldn’t take it.’

‘I don’t understand,’ said Leela. ‘I suppose you did something clever?’

‘Well, I think it was rather clever,’ admitted the Doctor.

‘What do you think, K9?’

‘Affirmative, Master.’

‘You see, K9 thought it was clever, too. And he should know, he’s a very clever little automaton.’

K9 was not to be distracted by flattery. ‘Let us continue the chess game, Master. My prediction is mate in six moves. It is your move.’

‘Is it?’ said the Doctor and pulled a lever on the console.

The TARDIS lurched violently, the Doctor’s hatstand fell over, and K9 shot across the floor, crashing into the board and sending the chessmen flying in all directions.

The Doctor said apologetically, ‘Afraid I’m still having a bit of trouble with this console, K9. We’ll have to finish the game later.’

K9 cocked his head suspiciously. ‘When, Master?’ ‘Oh, later... sometime,’ said the Doctor vaguely. ‘I’m sure we’ll get round to it – one of these days...’

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